



P. G. B. B. B.



SCC  
3246





D E I S M

FAIRLY STATED,

A N D

FULLY VINDICATED, &c.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

[Price Eighteen-Pence.]

D E I S M

REVISED

AND

REVISED

REVISED

REVISED

✓  
D E I S M  
FAIRLY STATED,  
A N D  
FULLY VINDICATED  
FROM THE  
GROSS IMPUTATIONS  
A N D  
GROUNDLESS CALUMNIES  
O F  
MODERN BELIEVERS.

W H E R E I N

Some of the PRINCIPAL REASONS contained in  
Dr. BENSON's *Answer to Christianity not founded  
on Argument* are fully considered, and proved  
to be far from conclusive.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

---

By a MORAL PHILOSOPHER.

---

*For Modes of Faith let graceless Zealots fight,  
His can't be wrong whose Life is in the Right.*

POPE.

---

L O N D O N :

Printed for W. WEBB, near St. Paul's, MDCCXLVI.

*Mr Reddish.*

D E I S M

PAINTED

and

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED

PAINTED





D E I S M

FAIRLY STATED,

A N D

FULLY VINDICATED, &c.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

S I R,



T was with no ordinary Degree of Pleasure that I formerly used to converse with you, on philosophical and theological Subjects. Your good Sense, good Nature, and Candour ; your extensive Erudition, and more extensive Charity, render you a most agreeable and instructive Companion. But this is a Blessing I have a long time been deprived of, by my Removal to a Place, at too great a Distance from you. However, I think, this Misfortune may in some measure be compensated, by your favouring me with your Thoughts, in a

B

friendly

friendly Epistle, on the *two* forementioned Subjects, which may be comprized in *one*, viz. *Moral Philosophy*. You see, Sir, how desirous I am to propagate that Intimacy so long since contracted, by thus introducing it, in this public Way ; nor can you but remember, that you were wont to conclude our amicable Debates with the following, or like, Sentence : “ *Well, I have Charity for the*  
“ *Sincere, and Well-meaning, of all the various*  
“ *Denominations of fallible Men, and for you in*  
“ *particular ; but don't take it amiss if I freely tell*  
“ *you, I think you are an honest Infidel.*” Now, tho' I profess I never took it ill at your Hands, yet, I assure you, it gave me Concern, to find myself thus stigmatized ; and at the same time, in Conscience, obliged to differ from my most valuable Friends ; and particularly from yourself, of whose Parts and Integrity, I had Reason to have the highest Esteem. However, it was attended with one happy Consequence, viz. It put me on a serious Re-examination of the Motives to my entertaining those exploded Sentiments, and the Justness of those Reasonings upon which they were grounded. Much about the time I was deprived of your Conversation, I was in the midst of those my Researches, and, not having *you* any longer to have recourse to, I applied myself, in the most impartial and unprejudiced Manner, to the reading such Christian Writers as had obtained the greatest Reputation, both for sound Judgment and nervous Reasoning. But, after all, not having found  
whereon

whereon to rest the Sole of my Foot, as a consistent Christian, and an honest Man, in the same Person, I could think of no better Expedient, than to return to you, for a Solution of those weighty Objections, which appear intolvable to me.

Before I proceed to answer the repeated Calls and Invitations of such of your Christian Brethren, as have most Reason to be confident of the Goodness of their Cause, by freely producing to public Consideration those strong Objections, as they (by way of *Contempt*) are pleased to call them; I beg leave to lay before you my Complaint against some of them, for very injurious Treatment of their Adversaries; of whom I may say, and, surely, with your Approbation, they are too positive and angry to do Service to any Cause; even that of the Heathens they affect so much to despise. That there is such a thing as true Religion, how differently soever Men may think concerning it, I no more doubt of, than I do of my own Existence; but the Gentlemen I refer to are very positive it consists, some, in one Set of Opinions; and some, in another; and all are unanimous, (which very rarely happens where Unanimity is requisite) in supposing that Integrity of Heart, and Regularity of Life, in those who dissent from them, will leave them still short of a well-grounded Hope of Salvation, while they continue to question, whether certain speculative Truths, and uninvestigable  
Points

Points of Faith, (which they are pleased to call Fundamentals) may not be Matters of Indifference. And in the too vigorous Exercise of this their Zeal without Knowledge, they have not been ashamed, in the Face of the World, to make the grossest Imputations to, and raise such Calumnies against, the Deists, as are not only groundless, but apparently stupid and ridiculous. ‘Thus, among many that might be produced, the celebrated Dr. *Waterland*, in his second Charge to —— has this remarkable Sentence: “ *What Atheism chiefly aims*  
“ *at is, to sit loose from present Restraints and fu-*  
“ *ture Reckonings; and these two Purposes may be*  
“ *competently served by Deism, which is a more re-*  
“ *finèd Kind of Atheism.*” Astonishing Assertion! since, if what Atheism chiefly aims at, be to sit loose from present Restraints, and future Reckonings; then a sincere Belief of the Existence of a God, and of an impartial Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, in another World, and a Practice that naturally results from, and is consonant to such Belief, and which strictly and properly is true Deism, this, surely, is the grand Barrier, the principal Obstruction, to the obtaining the chief Aims and Purposes of Atheism; and consequently, the true Deist, who has a steady Belief of the Existence of a God, and of his being accountable to him for his Actions, is, by such Belief, brought under all those Restraints, and expects that future Reckoning, which naturally flows from it. And as certainly as a Deist believes the Existence of a  
God,

God, and the consequent Obligations he is under, to practise the Duties necessarily arising from the Relations he stands in to him ; so certainly he believes, all the present Restraints from Sin, and from violating the Laws of his Maker, his Reason and Nature, which he finds himself under, to be greatly reasonable ; and consequently will, with the highest Pleasure, make it the great Business of his Life to keep himself from breaking thro' Restraints, which he thus perceives the Equity and Reasonableness of. Deism therefore is so far from being a more *refined Kind* of Atheism, nay from having the least remote Relation thereto, as to be just as diametrically opposite to it, as the very believing is to the absolute Disbelief of the Existence of a God ! Deism, properly so called, whatever ill Usage it may have met with, is no other than the Religion essential to Man, the true, original Religion of Reason and Nature ; such as was believed and practised by SOCRATES, and others of old, who were as great Ornaments, and did as much Honour, to human Nature, as any Christians ever did ; nor is it possible for true Religion to be otherwise, whilst God who formed our Faculties, and in their Measure adjusted them to it, continues to be immutable, and Man continues to be a rational Being.

And it is in Deism, properly so called, that our more discerning and rational Divines have constantly placed the alone Excellency, and true Glory,  
of



of the Christian Institution. “ *The Religion of the*  
“ *Gospel is the true, original Religion of Reason and*  
“ *Nature,*” says Dr. Sherlock. And in another  
Part of the same Sermon, viz. that preached be-  
fore the Society for propagating the Gospel in fo-  
reign Parts, he says, “ *Since then the Doctrine of*  
“ *Repentance, with which the Gospel set out in the*  
“ *World, had reference to the Law of Reason and*  
“ *Nature,*” ( as he had excellently shewn before  
that it had ) “ *against which Men had every where*  
“ *offended; and since Repentance infers the Necef-*  
“ *sity of a future Reformation, and a Return to*  
“ *that Duty and Obedience from which by Trans-*  
“ *gression we are fallen; the Consequence is mani-*  
“ *festly this, That the Gospel was a Republication of*  
“ *the Law of Nature, and its Precepts declarative*  
“ *of that original Religion which was as old as the*  
“ *Creation.*” And in Page 21, he ingenuously  
owns, “ *It is true also, that there are some Institu-*  
“ *tions in the Gospel, which in their own Nature*  
“ *are no constituent Parts of Religion.*” And with  
great Submission I will venture to add, that the  
same may be said, for aught that appears to the  
contrary, of some *Doctrines* of the Gospel; which  
Doctrines, together with the Institutions referred  
to, may be said to constitute *pure Christianity*, by  
way of Contradistinction to *pure natural Religion*.  
Mr. Chandler, in his Dedication to a Sermon  
preached in the Old Jury, Page 8, says, “ *If na-*  
“ *tural Religion is not Part of the Religion of Christ,*  
“ *’tis scarce worth while to enquire at all what his*  
“ *Religion*

“ *Religion is.*” From whence it seems very natural to infer, that the other Parts of the Religion of *Christ* are scarce worth any thing at all of our Notice. So excellent and glorious a Part of the Christian Institution, then is true Deism, or pure natural Religion, as adopted into, and proposed to be incorporated with it. Now what I have cited from those judicious Divines, which so directly prove the Absurdity of Dr. *Waterland*’s extravagant Assertion, I beg leave to add, that notwithstanding all the absurd and bitter things, that have been falsely laid to its Charge, by the Doctor and others, Deism is all in the Christian Institution, that can possibly approve itself to the true, genuine Reason of Man. Every thing in the Gospel, enjoined on its Professors to be believed, as a rational Doctrine, or practised as a natural Duty, relating to God, our Neighbour, or ourselves, is a constituent, an essential Part of Deism, or of true, that is, natural Religion. Now the single Question here, between Christians and Deists, I conceive to be this, namely, Whether the Belief of natural Doctrines, and the Practice of natural Duties, are all that is strictly necessary, with regard to the divine Approbation; and consequently, human Happiness, both present and eternal? To the Solution of these momentous Points, the serious Consideration of the following Propositions may have no inconsiderable Tendency.

I. Every

I. Every Duty, that indispensibly obliges a Man to the Performance of it, must be founded on some apparent natural Reason ; for unless there be such a Reason for the Belief of a Proposition, or performing an Action, whence arises the Obligation to either ?

II. The Reason on which the Obligation to the Discharge of a Duty is founded, necessarily results from the Relation the Person to perform it stands in to the Party to whom it is to be performed.

III. If the Reason of a Duty ariseth from the Relation subsisting between the Parties concerned, then 'tis obvious, every such Duty has its Foundation in the Nature of Things.

IV. Whatsoever else goes under the Denomination of Duty, cannot really be such ; but must have, by some unwarrantable Means or other, that Name (in strict Reason unalienable) sacrilegiously imputed to it. For were it really what it is pretended to be, *viz.* a Duty, it must, according to the preceding Proposition, have its Foundation in the Nature of Things ; and as certainly as it is not therein founded, the Observation of it as a Duty, in order to secure the Favour of God, and eternal Salvation, seems to be unnecessary, and mere Superstition.

V. Natural



V. Natural Duties only are capable of being perceived by us to be Duties ; these having their Foundation in Nature, and the Reason of Things themselves, are, in a Degree proportionable to our respective Faculties, to be traced out by us ; but whatever has not its Foundation there, and is but authoritatively asserted to be a Duty, can never possibly be perceived by us to be so, and must necessarily be derived from Superstition or Enthusiasm.

VI. That adorable Being! who in infinite Wisdom created us with reasoning Powers and Faculties, very limited and confined, will, in Justice, require of us a Conduct, but proportionate to the Abilities of Perception and Action that we have, and not according to what we have not.

So that now, if from the due Consideration of the above Propositions, it should be thought sufficiently to appear, that those Duties only are necessary to be believed and practised by us, the Reasons of which we perceive to be founded in Nature ; and the Discharge of which, in the best Manner we can, is intimately connected with our Happiness, and the Approbation of him, whose Favour is better than Life ; then it will follow, That if any thing else is enjoined as a Duty, in any, even in the Christian Institution, it cannot be necessary to be observed, in order to eternal Salvation. And as every Doctrine or Precept of

the Gospel, that has its Foundation discernable in Nature, is an essential and constituent Part of the Religion of Nature, or Deism ; so Deism is all, in the Christian Institution, that can possibly approve itself, to the true, genuine Reason of Man. Let then the *Waterlands*, the *Warburtons*, and the *Stebbing*s of the Age, if not for the sake of Modesty, yet for the sake of the high Character they assume as *Embassadors* of CHRIST, no longer substitute Scurrility, and Sophistry, in the room of Reason and Argument ; but if they must be writing against the Deists, let them do it, by fairly denying their real Principles, and openly avowing, and defending the contrary to them. What Honour they would reflect by this honest Procedure, on the Religion they profess, will obviously appear, by considering a few fundamental Principles of the Deists, the opposite to which, it will then fall to their Lot to maintain.

I. There is a God ; that is, a necessarily-existing, self-sufficient, and an infinitely perfect *Being*, who is, in and of himself, infinitely happy.

II. Infinite Happiness, considered as essential to the Deity, appears to be the Result of the Contemplation of his own essential Perfections, and a pure Consciousness of an invariable Conformity in Affection and Action, to Truth.

III. Truth, abstractedly considered, has a necessary

cessary Existence in Nature, independent of, and, in the Order of our Conceptions, prior to, the Will of any Being whatever.

IV. To us, the only conceivable Motive the supreme Being could have to create us, and every other Species of intelligent Beings, was that of communicating Happiness to us, and them.

V. Rational and intelligent Creatures are capable of being in their Measure happy, as God is happy, but only, as in their Measure they are pure, as He is pure: Or, in other Words, as they conscientiously conform themselves to the Law of Truth, and discharge the Obligations of Reason.

VI. As, by our very Frame and Constitution, we are rendered incapable of Perfection, so the kind Author of our Beings, who could not make us but to be happy, will graciously accept a sincere Desire, and Endeavour, to know and do what is right, and Penitence and Amendment, in all those Instances in which it appears to us we have done otherwise; this being the nearest Approach to Perfection, that, in our present State, we are capable of.

VII. To aspire after rational Happiness, the same in Kind with that of the Deity, by an humble Imitation of him, in all his imitable moral Perfections,

Perfections, is the only End of all true Religion. He therefore who really believes the Being of a God ; that he is possessed of every possible Perfection ; that he is necessarily happy in the Consciousness of the Perfection of his Being, and the absolute Rectitude of his whole Nature ; that believes likewise there is Truth in opposition to Falshood, that it has a necessary Existence in Nature, and who in his Measure regards it too, in the Whole of his Conduct, and thereby aspires to assimilate himself to the Deity in Rectitude and in Bliss, that is, aims by being pure as God is pure, to become happy as he is happy ; is a truly religious Man, a proper Object of Divine Complacence, a promising Candidate for Heaven, and the refined, intellectual Joys of that unknown, tho' certain and immortal, State of Existence.

Having proposed this equitable Method, for those Gentlemen I have complained of, to regard in their dealing with the Deist, I shall enter upon what I intended, namely, the proposing to you my Difficulties with regard to Christianity, in order to obtain Satisfaction ; by making my Objections to those Doctrines that lie out of the reach of our Reason, to determine of their Truth or Falshood ; and those Institutions, which are confessedly no constituent Parts of Religion. As I apprehend it to be the proper Business of the Understanding, to be chiefly imployed in the great Affairs of Religion, because this is the only rational Means

Means of obtaining the sole End of Being, *viz.* Happiness ; so in my Exercises of this kind I have deemed it my Duty to endeavour to acquire, and therefore have paid a steady Regard to, Truth ; and whether upon an impartial Examination, I thought I found it among Friends, or Strangers, learned, or illiterate, whether agreeable, or contrary to the Notions I have been educated in, I have treated it with equal Deference and readily embraced it. But as I am not more certain of the Truth of any Proposition than this, *viz.* I am fallible, and therefore may err ; so I chuse not only to review my Sentiments myself, but also to call in to my Assistance a Friend, whose Ability and Integrity I am thoroughly satisfied of. I have above observed, that formerly when I heard you apply the Name, Infidel, to me, it gave me some Uneasiness ; but upon a repeated Enquiry into the Reasons of that Uneasiness, I am far from finding there were any just ones for it ; so that I venture to tell you, I think my present Sentiments may very properly be stiled Deism, as *that* imports the Religion of Things, and not of unmeaning, or many meaning Words ; of the Heart, but not of the Book. It is not nominal, but real, Deism I now intend ; and by which, Sir, I would fain be understood to mean, that Religion, which consists of only such Doctrines and Precepts as appear to have their Foundation in Reason and Nature. And tho' it is said by some, that Christianity is grounded on natural Religion, and is an Improvement of it ; yet, after  
all

all that has been said to exemplify it, or that has been offered in Proof of it, I cannot possibly conceive how an entire and perfect Structure (which is the Case of natural Religion) can only be a Foundation for a perfect Structure ; or how a perfect Religion can be improved ; or what is essential to Man, can be but of small Importance to him, in Comparison of what is superadded, and to which his Understanding is inadequate. To come to the Point, I think the grand Foundation of the Difference betwixt the Deists, and the Religious of all other Persuasions, is, whether any Doctrine, or Precept, that has not its Foundation apparently in Reason and Nature, can be of the Essence of Religion, and with Propriety be said to be a religious Doctrine or Precept. With regard to this Question, Christians may be put in two Classes ; *viz.* First, Those who maintain, that Doctrines and Practices, which have no Foundation in Reason or Nature, may be of the Essence of Religion ; and, secondly, those who maintain, that Doctrines and Practices, which do not apparently appear to be founded in Nature and Reason, may yet, notwithstanding, be of the Essence of Religion. Those in the first Class, who maintain that Doctrines and Practices, may be of the Essence of Religion, tho' not founded in Nature and Reason, seem to be drawn into it, from a mistaken Notion of the divine Sovereignty ; which they imagine will be properly exercised by the Deity, in doing and commanding what is repugnant to all his other Perfections. *Ziglovius*, a *Dutch* Author, has



on this Principle affirmed, “ *That God may, if he please, out of the vast Sovereignty of his Will, command all that Wickedness which he has forbidden, and make it our Duty; and also forbid all that Holiness which he hath commanded, and make it become Sin to us.*” This is to represent that adorable Being, who is infinitely perfect, as being perfectly capricious; and stupidly endeavouring to raise the Glory of one of God’s Attributes, on the Ruin of the rest. Those Christians of the second Class so far agree with the Deists, as to own that God, who is infinite in Knowledge, and can never know things to be otherwise than they are in themselves, cannot possibly consider, nor constitute any Doctrine or Precept, to be of the Essence of Religion, which is not so in itself, as not being founded in Truth and Reason. The Law and Religion of Reason and Nature, they readily acknowledge, as necessarily contain in them every thing really and truly religious, as the Whole its Parts; and as necessarily exclude every thing of a different nature from them, as it is naturally different. But then they argue, that as the Religion of Nature, thus absolutely considered and in its full Extent, is only known to God, if he should be pleased to make a supernatural Revelation of such Parts of that Law to us, which our unassisted Reason could never have discovered; such a Revelation ought to be gratefully received, and readily acknowledged. And tho’ no Doctrine, that has not its Foundation in Reason and Nature, can be a truly religious

ous Doctrine; yet Doctrines that have such a Foundation (though that does not appear) may if God pleases, be communicated to us, either by himself immediately, or mediately by his Agents, without any Reflection on, or Repugnancy to, any one of his Attributes. And this, say they, is the Case of all the speculative, metaphysical, and sublime Doctrines contained in the Scriptures, which collectively compose the Christian Faith; these are so many Revelations of the Law of Nature, which unassisted Reason could not discover; and though they remain incomprehensible, and lie out of the Reach of Reason, yet when that which is imperfect shall be done away, and Faith is turned into Vision, they will then appear to us to be founded in Truth and Reason.

From the Case thus fairly stated, I think, it appears, that the Difference betwixt those rational Christians and the Deists, will, without any farther Trouble, be adjusted, when this Proposition (which Christians lay down for a certain Truth) *viz.* That the Collection of Writings commonly called the Scriptures are of divine Inspiration, and a Revelation from God to Mankind, be plainly, and clearly, made appear to be so. Seeing then, it is only seemingly, and but in Appearance, the Deist and the more rational sort of Christians dispute, whether Doctrines that in themselves are truly religious, must as such, necessarily have their Foundation in Reason and Nature; the real

Question



Question between them is resolved into this, *viz.* Whether those Scripture Doctrines that cannot be perceived, by Reason, to have their Foundation in the Reason and Nature of Things are, notwithstanding, certainly thus founded; and ought to be allowed to be so, only because they are contained in the Scripture. Now the Resolution of this material Question altogether depends upon the Proof that is to be made by Christians, that the Scriptures are a divine (\*) Revelation, and the very Word of God. For if that Point be proved the Controversy at once is at an end; there being no true Deist, that will hesitate a Moment to allow,

( \*) By divine Revelation, and the very Word of God, is not meant any Light, Information, or Instruction Men may have attained to, touching a Deity, their Duty to him, &c. from the Consideration of the natural World, and in the due Exercise of their natural Powers, (as the invisible Things of God are clearly perceived by his Works, being understood by the Things that are made); but such Light, Information, or Instruction as has been communicated to Men, in and by some immediate, particular, and special Interposition of the Deity, for that Purpose; this is, properly speaking, divine Revelation, and the very Word of God. Nevertheless, as all moral or religious Principles, that are founded in Reason, are worthy of God, and agreeable to him; so these, in a very loose and improper Sense, may be called divine Revelation, what way soever we attain to the Knowledge of them; And therefore, not to contend about Words, let it be admitted to call such Principles divine Revelation, only let it be remembered, that all such Principles have an equal Title to be called a divine Revelation, using the Terms in the same Sense, whatever Writing or Book they may be contained in.

that what God saith is Truth, because he knows all things, and therefore cannot err himself, nor will he deceive, or impose upon us. In order then to a proper Determination of this momentous Affair, the Reasons, upon which the Belief of the divine Original of the Scriptures is built, are to be produced, by the Christians on one Side, in all their Weight ; and to be examined, by the Deists on the other, with that Impartiality, and Indifference to every Opinion, as such ; which alone can properly denominate them Lovers of Truth.

But alas ! alas ! here we have a surprising Instance of the want of Unanimity among Christians, where it seems to be so peculiarly requisite, that without it, they must not only expect to fail of convincing the Deists of the Truth of their Cause, but also render it a doubtful Point whether they are rationally convinced of the Truth of it themselves. For if we begin with the Roman Catholics, who have vastly the Advantage in point of Numbers, and plainly ask them, How know you the Scriptures (which with them includes the Apocryphal Books) to be the Word of God ? they answer, By the Testimony of the Church, and assure us we cannot be certain of it, by any other Argument. This Answer of the Catholics to the Question proposed, is so wide of the Purpose, to satisfy an honest Enquirer, of the Reality of the Inspiration and Infallibility of the Scriptures, that it satisfies him, he is only to expect, fallible,

fallible, human Testimony in Proof of it. The Weakness, and Absurdity of this Method of Proof, has been so fully shewn, by some eminent Protestants, as to render it perfectly needless, for Deists, to make any Repetition of what is so generally known and approved. It will therefore be proper to proceed to the Examination of some of the principal Answers vouchsafed us by Protestants; I say, by Protestants, because tho' they would seem to agree in that general Proposition, *viz.* The Scriptures are known to be the Word of God by themselves, in Opposition to the Papists, who say they are known to be so only by the Testimony of the Church; yet they really differ as widely one from another, as from the Papists; not only in laying the Foundation, but in their respective Superstructures built upon it. One maintaining, that they are known to be the Word of God by themselves, to those only whose Eyes the Spirit of God is pleased in a distinguishing manner to open, to perceive the certain Characters of divine Truth in them. Another maintaining, that they are to be known, and will manifestly appear, to be the Word of God by themselves, upon an honest Investigation of mere natural Reason, to any Man who shall impartially exercise it about them.

Mr. *Pemle*, in his Treatise of Grace and Faith, says, “ *We know the Scriptures are the Word of God by themselves, the Spirit of God opening our*  
*“ Eyes*

“ *Eyes to see those natural and lively Characters of*  
 “ *divine Truth, which are imprinted on those sacred*  
 “ *Volumes. But how* (he asks a little after) *doth*  
 “ *the Holy Ghost reveal unto us the Truth of Scrip-*  
 “ *ture ?*” (he answers) “ *By removing those Im-*  
 “ *pediments that hinder, and by bestowing those*  
 “ *Graces, Illumination and Sanctification, that make*  
 “ *us capable of this Knowledge.*” To animadvert  
 upon the particular manner of knowing the Scrip-  
 tures to be the Word of God by themselves, or by  
 knowing them to be so, by something besides  
 themselves, as it is beside my present Business, I  
 shall omit it, and only consider the Proposition in  
 its obvious and direct Meaning. To this Propo-  
 sition then, we know the Scriptures to be the  
 Word of God by themselves, as an Answer of a  
 Party of Protestants to the Question above, (*viz.*  
 How know you the Scriptures to be the Word of  
 God?) the Roman Catholics in their Turn re-  
 ply, that Scripture is delivered to most Protest-  
 ants by Translations, and they depend upon the  
 Skill of fallible Men, who may err, and of whom  
 it is certain that some of them have erred, because  
 their Translations are contrary : So that according  
 to the Papists, if the Scriptures were primarily and  
 in themselves the Word of God, yet it does not  
 follow that the translated Scriptures of Protestants  
 are such ; as but one of the many Translations can  
 be right ; and which of them all is that one, can-  
 not certainly be determined ; because the Scrip-  
 tures may have undergone, with all other Al-  
 terations,

terations, the Alterations which Language is unavoidably liable to ; and consequently, the Scriptures of Protestants cannot be known to be the Word of God by themselves. But admitting that this Objection of the Papists is of no Weight, and that the Scriptures have been truly translated from the Languages they were originally written in ; yet, as they have passed through the Hands of many Transcribers in those Languages, who had it in their Power greatly to corrupt them, and we cannot be certain but they were so corrupted ; it follows, the Scriptures in these latter Ages, cannot possibly be proved to be the Word of God by themselves. And that this Argument may be extended to its utmost Bounds, let it be admitted, that the Scriptures have not sustained any Injury by Transcribers ; the Question will return, How are they to be known to be the Word of God by themselves ? Is it by their own Testimony, concerning themselves ? or by the Reasonableness, and apparent Truth, of each, and all the Doctrines and Precepts contained in them ? As to the first, *viz.* their own Testimony concerning themselves, this alone cannot be a proper Ground of Credence ; seeing this is as positively affirmed of itself, by every other traditionary Revelation throughout the World. Besides, their own Testimony cannot yield a proper Ground of Conviction to an unbiassed Enquirer, because those Enquirers are not previously convinced of the actual Inspiration, and absolute Infallibility of the several



veral Authors of the Scriptures ; this Point indeed once gained, they might certainly know the Scriptures to be the Word of God by themselves ; for an infallible Testimony of an inspired Author in the Case, would effectually extinguish all future Doubt concerning it. But this Assurance of the Infallibility and Inspiration of the several Authors of those Books called the *Bible*, is the very Point in Question, and required to be proved ; and of which its own Testimony concerning itself can be no proper Evidence. As to the second kind of Proofs, viz. The Reasonableness and apparent Truth of each of its Doctrines and Precepts respectively, this is not so much as pretended by those Protestants whose Answer we are now particularly considering ; for they propose not to see the Character of divine Truth in the Scripture, by any other Means, than that of having their Eyes supernaturally opened for that purpose ; these Gentlemen being too much of a piece to expect Proof in any other way. Mere Morality and the bare Exercise of our natural Powers in Matters of Religion, they esteem altogether ineffectual with regard to Salvation ; and things beyond Morality, and out of the Verge of human Reason, they are so well assured are not to be acquired by Reason, that they ascribe the Acquisition of them, wholly, to the Operation of the Holy Ghost. And as the Operation of the Holy Ghost, and the Testimony grounded upon it, is merely arbitrary, and extends no farther than to him whom it operates upon ;

on ; so it cannot possibly be enquired into, nor be a Ground of Conviction to another.

So that this Method of proving the Scriptures to be the very Word of God by themselves, viz. by reasoning upon the Subject Matter contained in them, falls to the Lot of the rational Divines, the Friends of Liberty, and free Debate ; who own with the Reverend Mr. Chandler, “ *That the Religion of Christ must be understood before it can or ought to be believed ; and that it must be proved to be a consistent and rational Religion, before Men can be under any Obligation to receive it.*” I shall cheerfully and carefully attend to what they have to offer in Defence of their Hypothesis, and allow their Arguments all their real Weight. The Reverend Mr. Chillingworth, who was perhaps the greatest public Defender the Protestants ever had to boast of, in p. 53 of his *Religion of Protestants a safe Way to Salvation*, has a Sentence well worth regarding. This great Man interrogates his Adversaries thus, “ *If Scripture cannot be the Judge of any Controversy, how shall that touching the Church and the Notes of it be determined ? And if it be the sole Judge of this one, why may it not of others ? why not of all ? those only excepted, wherein the Scripture itself is the Subject of the Question, which cannot be determined but by natural Reason, the only Principle besides Scripture which is common to Christians.*” So that the Principle of the natural Blindness of the human Understanding, and the absolute Necessity of its being supernatu-  
rally

ally illuminated, in order to perceive the Characters of divine Truth in the Scriptures, is wholly excluded, and natural Reason is affirmed to be the Judge in those Controversies, where the Scripture itself is the Subject of them. According to this great Man then, the Scriptures will appear to be the Word of God to every Man, who, in the best manner he can, does exercise his Reason, in the Perusal of them. If then the great Controversy, in which the divine Authority of Scripture is the Subject, cannot be determined but by natural Reason, and natural Reason can determine as it is here supposed ; if it determines in its Favour, it must be, because all the Parts of it are not only proper Subjects of its Examination, but likewise appear when examined to be apparently reasonable. But Matters supernatural are incapable of an Examination by natural Reason ; and therefore, are incapable of being apparently reasonable, or being approved of as such by our reasoning Faculties. And if there are such supernatural Matters in the Scriptures, as I presume must be admitted, these cannot be pronounced by Reason (the allowed Judge in the Case) to be at all the Word and Revelation of God. Where natural Reason is Judge, it appears to be, if not impossible, at least highly improbable, that it should determine rightly concerning the Truth or Falseness of supernatural Matters. And upon the closest Inspection into this grand Affair, I am for the present pretty well convinced that not only the  
great



great *Chillingworth*, but our distinguished Moderns, among the rational Divines, with all their Refinement, are equally gravelled with their Predecessors, when they come to the Discussion of this unmanageable Point, *viz.* that the Scriptures are known to be the Word and Revelation of God, upon an honest Investigation of mere natural Reason, to any Man who shall impartially exercise it about them. For can a thing be but what it is, and yet be more than what it is at the same time? can a Man have but the Understanding of a Man, and yet discern that which is quite out of the Reach of the human intellectual Faculties to perceive? which must be the Case, if Man can by his Reason discern the Truth of a Proposition, that is above his Reason, or be rationally convinced of the Truth of what lies quite out of the Reach of his reasoning Faculty to form any Judgment at all about. And tho' some of our Divines have added to the Evidence arising from the internal Characters of the Scriptures, the external Evidences of Prophecies and Miracles, in order to prove the Scriptures to be a divine Revelation, and the Word of God; yet these external Evidences fall greatly short of giving proper Proof in the present Case; for were all the Prophecies that have ever been given forth by Jews, Sibils, Christians, or others; and all the Miracles that have ever been wrought, taken into the Account, and considered either separately, or collectively, they would fall short of proving all the following Points; namely, that all

E

those

those Books, which constitute that Collection of Tracts, commonly called the Bible, were written by the Persons respectively whose Names they bear ; that the Deity immediately dictated to, and impressed upon, the Mind of each Writer, the Subject Matter contained therein, effectually restraining each one from mixing his own Conceptions, with what had been thus dictated to him ; and that these Books have been faithfully transmitted from their respective original Copies down to us, without any Corruption, Alteration, Addition, or Diminution ; and if Prophecy and Miracles fall short of proving these Points, which most certainly they do ; then consequently, they fall equally short of proving the Scriptures to be a divine Revelation, and the very Word of God. Nevertheless, as to all those intelligible Parts of Scripture, which approve themselves to the human Understanding, by obviously appearing to have their Foundation in Reason and Nature, tho' a Deist cannot admit them to be immediately revealed in a miraculous and supernatural Manner, to the respective Persons by whom they are exhibited to the World ; because it does not appear to him that they have been proved to be so, and because they are to be discovered to be what they are by the human Understanding, in the ordinary and natural Use of its Faculties ; yet he readily admits that they are worthy and valuable Truths, and willingly pays to them all that Veneration and Regard, which is suitable to the Dignity and Importance

Importance of the several Subjects they relate to. And as to all the mysterious and unintelligible Parts of Scripture, they are the same as if they were not, as to any good Purpose that can be served by them ; for as St. Paul has justly observed, *If the Trumpet gives an uncertain Sound, who shall prepare himself for the Battle ?* St. Paul's reasoning, 1 Cor. cap. xiv. on the Subject of speaking in an unknown Tongue, is certainly just, and worthy to be considered ; and the Case is the same with regard to unintelligible Propositions. There are, it may be said (saith the Apostle Verses 10, 11.) *So many kind of Voices in the World, and none of them are without Signification. Therefore, if I know not the Meaning of the Voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a Barbarian ; and he that speaketh shall be a Barbarian unto me.* So that according to St. Paul, were the Deity to give forth mysterious, and unintelligible Propositions to his Creatures, he would be a Barbarian to them ; and they would be Barbarians unto him ; but, surely, the Deity will not be such a Trifler, and therefore the Supposition is not to be admitted ; and consequently an unintelligible Proposition gives a clearer and stronger Proof that such a Proposition is not of divine Authority, than any external Evidence can possibly give that it is. So that those Gentlemen who undertake to prove the Scriptures to be the very Word of God by the Scriptures themselves, if they will effectually answer the real End of this toilsom Enterprize, are to demonstrate

monstrate that those Parts of Scripture objected to by the Deists, as unintelligible, now they are revealed in the Bible (whatever they may have been before) are on a level with natural Reason, and are approvable by it ; for otherwise, how apparently ridiculous must it be to say, that they are revealed to, and lent in aid of Reason, and likewise that they are to be judged of by it ; which Point, if I am not mistaken, has been found to be an insuperable Difficulty to them. However, let the Matter be brought to a fair Tryal.

These, Sir, you know are the weighty Points which for many Years past have been contested by the biblical Believers, and Rationalists ; and to which Side Truth inclines, I must own, seems to me at present no difficult Matter to determine. Many of the Former, it must be acknowledged to their Praise, have not used the circumstantial Advantages they were incidentally in the Possession of, to favour their Cause, but have rested it upon the single Foot of Reason and Argument ; and being put upon this Foot, the rational Free-thinkers have readily engaged ; the Consequence of which has been, that not only the different Schemes entire, but also in all their material Parts, have been distinctly placed, and viewed in all their different Points of Light. And by this Means, a true Judgment may have been more easily formed than before, by Men of all Degrees that were disposed to judge for themselves, on which Side

Truth

Truth (the only valuable End of all our theological Enquiries) lies. And tho' many great Men on the traditionary Side have displayed their Abilities, and have acquitted themselves honourably ; yet a Man of your Peneration and Integrity, may possibly have perceived, that since all enthusiastical Superiority, and superstitious Deference has been disclaimed by them, they, even they, are reduced to the hard Fate of capitulating, or else retreating under the Covert of idle Distinctions and mysterious Darknefs. Fairly producing, and chearfully submitting to your Examination, the Reasons why I think this to be the Case, was one of the two principal Motives to my presenting you with this Epistle ; well knowing that if I failed in my Endeavour, you, who I think are, as far as any Man can be, a rational Christian, would shew me in the very Spirit of Religion, wherein I did so. Nothing then, I think, can have a more probable Tendency to furnish me with an Opportunity occasionally to offer you my Reasons why Truth beams forth on the Rationalists, than attending to the Arguments of some rational Divine, who has been generally applauded for distinguishing himself in some important recent Controversy, as much for the Cogency of his Reasoning and fair Dealing, as for the Eloquence and Order of his Writings.

The Controversy between the ingenious moral Philosopher, who answered the *Trial of the Witnesses*,

*nesses*, and the learned Author of that *Trial*, as it affects but a Part or single Doctrine of Christianity may not be so proper to select our Christian Advocate from, as that introduced by the Author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*; because the Latter is general, and affects the whole Cause. And as many have taken in hand to answer the Tract I referred to, thereby to remove from Christianity those Difficulties which, according to that Performance, it may seem to be incumbered with; so I have singled out Dr. *Benson* from the rest to be the Christian's Champion, because by his cultivating the Dialogue Stile in his Discussions, he has rendered himself more popular, and by his being very copious, may be thought to carry the Weight, and Strength, of all the rest. This Gentleman has so strenuously opposed, in some Parts of his Book, his enthusiastic Brethren, and their Scheme of Christianity, which has been exhibited to the World, by the Author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*, as to render his own Principles a Subject of Dispute; and has effectually answered that Author's real Design (supposing him to have been a Deist) by his frequently falling full into the Scheme of the true Deists, and tacitly, at least, acknowledging that all they contend against in Christianity, is indefeasible on the foot of Reason.

Dr. *Benson* having (in Page 82) roundly asserted, without Hesitation or Restriction, that the rational



tional and examining Believer, when he has proved all things, holds fast that which is good, and what is good, in all Cases of Importance, may readily be distinguished from what is evil ; I beg leave to offer the following things to Consideration, which being natural Inferences from the above Postulatum, call for a particular Regard. 1. That Matters of Faith, such I mean as are peculiar to Christianity, in Contradistinction to such as are evidently essential to natural Religion, are so far from admitting a ready, that in their very Nature they are incapable of admitting any, Distinction at all, to any mere human Understanding, concerning what is right, or wrong, good, or evil in them ; because were their Truth and Goodness thus perceivable, they would plainly appear to be Parts of natural Religion ; and were the Contrary thus perceivable, then they would as plainly appear to be no Parts of true Religion at all. 2. Therefore, according to Dr. *Benson's* own Definition of Cases of Importance, Matters of mere Christian Faith cannot be reckoned as belonging to them ; because he expressly says what is good, in all Cases of Importance, may readily be distinguished from what is Evil. 3. As in mere Matters of Morality only, Reason can readily distinguish what is morally good from what is morally evil ; so mere Matters of Morality only can, according to Dr. *Benson*, be Cases of Importance ; that is, with regard to the Favour of God and eternal Salvation. Here, surely, it ought to be presumed

presumed that Dr. *Benson* wrote what he judged to be Truth, else his Integrity is arraigned, and consequently, that he really thinks those Cases only to be of Importance, in which he says Good and Evil may readily be distinguished ; and in which we are tied up in the Issue (not by an arbitrary Injunction implicitly to believe ; but) by the Force of Truth, by the Reason of Things, or by Argument and Evidence. And if Dr. *Benson* does really think as above, then I shall venture to infer, that he and the assuming Free-thinker are brought to shake Hands ; and notwithstanding they seem to differ, yet in all Cases of Importance they entertain the same Sentiments. But, perhaps, I shall be told that I have been too hasty in drawing my Conclusion ; for tho' what Dr. *Benson* has said as above, when considered alone (and apart from the manifest Design of his Book) affords in Appearance some Ground for it ; yet he afterwards explains himself, and exhibits his real Sentiments, by making it his Business to prove that Reason is not the only Guide in important Points of Faith ; and to shew the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion. Well, it is Truth and not Conquest I am in Pursuit of ; and therefore, If Dr. *Benson* can make it appear, by Reason, that Reason is not the only Guide in the Case under Consideration, and is only to be used in Subordination to some superior, directive Principle in the human System, tho' he would hereby greatly contradict himself ; yet that shall be no Bar to my Conviction ; I shall readily submit



submit to the Force of his Argument, and thank him for helping me on in my way.

Dr. *Benson* says, of a large Citation he had just made from the Book he attempted to answer, he apprehended that the “ *Author had in this, as well*  
 “ *as many other Particulars, misrepresented the ra-*  
 “ *tional Divines. He has indeed insinuated, p. 4.*  
 “ *that the rational Divines look upon Reason as the*  
 “ *only Guide in Matters of Religion. So again, p.*  
 “ *40, and 56, as if they held that a Man might at-*  
 “ *tain to the Belief of revealed Truths, by the Strength*  
 “ *of his natural Faculties ; and so in other Places.*  
 “ *Whereas the rational Divines themselves would*  
 “ *say, that Reason is not the only Guide in Matters*  
 “ *of Religion, but that Reason and Scripture are*  
 “ *both to be regarded ; and that without the Scrip-*  
 “ *tures Reason or Mens natural Faculties would never*  
 “ *have found out many things that are revealed in the*  
 Bible,” p. 90, 91. ’Tis true indeed they never could ; and the great thing at which many serious and inquisitive Men boggle, is, that now they are revealed (as it is called) they are no more to be understood, or judged of by the human Powers, than they were before to be found out by them ; and consequently (according to Dr. *Benson*) cannot be Matters of Importance ; and how such things can with Propriety be said to be revealed, they think stands very much in need of a Revelation to explain. Methinks it should be thought, by the Advocates of this Species of Revelation, to be the proper Business of its Vindicators, either to

shew how things can with Propriety be said to be revealed to the human Race, of which Man has no Faculty capable of forming an adequate Idea or Judgment ; or else that the Opinion of our having no Faculty equal to the Truths revealed, is a vulgar Error, and that though Reason is unequal to such a Task, yet there is in Man a Principle besides, and superiour to his Reason or Understanding, by which the things revealed are to be conceived and judged of. In short, to talk of a Revelation of certain things, to certain Beings, whose uppermost Faculty is incapable of understanding them, is an apparent Absurdity and Contradiction. And likewise to talk of a Revelation of things to Men in Aid of Reason, which tho' easily understood, yet Reason cannot discover any proper use can be made of them, is alike absurd and contradictory. That God will judge the World in Righteousness, and deal with every one according as he shall render himself the proper Object of divine Clemency, or Resentment, is a Doctrine which obviously appears to have its Foundation in Reason and Nature ; and moderate Understandings can easily discover its Usefulness, as it naturally tends to engage Men to act right, and to reclaim them when they have acted otherwise ; and therefore is not to be considered as supernatural, nor superrational. But that God will judge the World by *Jesus Christ*, does not appear to have its Foundation in Reason and Nature ; as there does not appear to the human Understanding

ing any Principle, any Premises from which this Conclusion may be fairly drawn, *viz.* that God will judge the World by a Substitute ; much less that he will do it by *Jesus Christ*. And as God will judge the World in Righteousness ; so it appears to human Reason to be quite indifferent, and of no Consequence, to the Creature who he is judged by, whether by the supreme Deity immediately, or by a Substitute ; and if by a Substitute, then whether by *Jesus Christ*, or any other Agent. I say, it must be a Matter of Indifference to the Creature, who shall be his immediate Judge, provided Righteousness be the Rule of that Judgment ; because his Sentence will be the same. And if Reason cannot make any Improvement of this revealed Doctrine, *viz.* That *Jesus Christ* will judge the World, which, surely, it cannot ; then how can it be said with either Propriety or Truth that it was given in Aid of it ? And if the Knowledge of this Truth (admitting it to be a Truth) *viz.* That *Jesus Christ* will judge the World, be of no more Consequence to Mankind in general, than the Knowledge of this Truth, *viz.* there is a burning Mountain in the Kingdom of *Naples*, is to the People of *England* in particular ; then this is a just Objection against the Divinity of this Doctrine ; because it is greatly improbable, that God should specially interpose, to acquaint the World with this, or any other Truth, the Knowledge of which Mankind would do altogether as well without.

But

But tho' the Author before referred to, has intimated that the rational Divines hold a Man may attain to the Belief of revealed Truths, by the Strength of his natural Faculties, Dr. *Benson* insinuates they hold no such Doctrine ; and at the same time informs us what it is, in this important Affair, they do hold ; namely, “ That as human  
 “ Reason is greatly limited and imperfect, and  
 “ has been exceedingly perverted and abused, Re-  
 “ velation came in aid of it ; and is a glorious ad-  
 “ ditional Talent, for which they who have the  
 “ Benefit of it are accountable, but not those who  
 “ have no Opportunity of coming acquainted  
 “ with it.” That human Reason is greatly limited and imperfect, is a Tenet held by all rational Men as well as by all rational Divines ; all such being very sensible, that the Deity alone is possessed of unlimited and perfect Reason. That Reason has by some Men been greatly perverted and abused, will be readily granted ; but that it has been universally so, will not be readily admitted. If human Reason be greatly limited and imperfect, then must it not be fair and equitable to expect that human Conduct at best will be proportionably so ? And if God acts consonant to the most perfect Reason, then will he not do it in these Instances, as well as in others, *viz.* overlook those lesser Miscarriages in his Creatures that are the natural Offspring of human Weakness ; and pardon such greater Offenders, as render themselves the proper Objects of Mercy, by their Peni-  
 tence

tence and Amendment? That human Reason is greatly limited and imperfect, is a Proposition which is readily subscribed to, on all hands; but what Purposes this limited Faculty was intended to serve, and is actually capable of, are Points, in which Men greatly differ. The Free-thinker conceives that human Reason, or that Principle of Discernment which takes place in Man, and makes a Part of the human Constitution, was intended by the Author of our Beings to discover, and to ascertain, the Truth of the following Propositions:

I. That the first Cause of all things is a Being, not only of the most boundless Power, but also of the most unlimited and perfect Reason or Understanding.

II. That in Nature there is the right and wrong of every Case that can possibly exist, or result from the infinitely various Positions and Modifications of either simple, or complex Ideas, Propositions, or things, at least, of all those Cases that right and wrong can possibly be relative to.

III. It may fairly be presumed, that infinite Reason is alone capable of distinguishing unner-  
ringly, betwixt Right and Wrong, in all, and every of that infinite variety of Cases, that ever has, does, or can possibly exist.



IV. How far each Individual of the human Species can, or may in Reason and Equity be expected to go, in conformity to the immutable Laws of Rectitude, in Judgment and in Practice, is probably only known to God ; and as we cannot know, so we ought not to presume to determine concerning it.

V. How deficient soever we are in the Knowledge of Nature, of each others intellectual Abilities and moral Conduct, much more of the abstract Nature and Perfections of God ; yet we are in general as certain as we are of the Existence of such a Being, that he is possessed of every possible Perfection ; and will not, in any the least Instance, deviate in his Conduct from perfect Rectitude.

VI. Therefore, God will require a Perfection of Conduct (if I may express it thus) from his imperfect Creatures, but in Proportion to the Perfection of their Reason ; for to produce a Rectitude of Manners more perfect or conformable to Truth, than they have Reason or Understanding to direct them to, is impossible.

VII. To govern our Conduct by our Reason is our Duty, and is all that God requires of us ; and to neglect to regulate our Conduct by our Reason, in that Proportion which God has been pleased to dispense it to us, is criminal, or blame-worthy.

VIII.



VIII. As there is no Individual of our Species, but has been more or less guilty, of deviating from the Rule prescribed him by his Reason, either the whole Species are unpardonably guilty before God, or else Repentance and Reformation are the Means of Reconciliation with him, and of restoring us to his Favour.

IX. That Repentance and Reformation are the natural Means of reconciling us to God, when we are conscious of our having offended him, is manifest from their being invariably recommended to us by our Reason, on all such Occasions, as the Means proper for effecting it ; for were the Case otherwise, they could not be dictated to us by Reason as Means to that End ; because had they not a natural Tendency to answer the End, they would be unfit for our Use, on account of their Insignificancy ; and to make use of insignificant Means, is a preposterous and unwarrantable Conduct ; and to suppose what is proposterous and unwarrantable can be the Dictate of Reason, is absurd and a direct Contradiction.

X. Therefore, to repent of what upon a cool Review of our Conduct appears to be criminal, and to reform it, is a Dictate of our Reason, is what God the Author of our Beings requires of us, in order for us to do on our Part what he knows to be necessary to our Happiness.

XI. If God requires, and directs us by Reason and Conscience, to perform what he knows is necessary to our Happiness ; he will certainly do on his Part what he knows is necessary to that End, *viz.* forgive us our Sins, and reinstate us in his Favour. And if so, then,

XII. All other Means that either have, are, or may be deem'd necessary, and made use of, as such, by Jews, Pagans, Christians, Mahometans, or others, are unnatural, and foreign to the Purpose ; and consequently, are superfluous, and downright Superstition.

The discovering and ascertaining the Truth of these Propositions, is a Purpose, among others, which the Deist thinks human Reason, in its present imperfect State, was intended to serve, and that it is actually capable of it ; but then this Creed in all its Articles is what Divines will by no Means subscribe to, because they think this is more than human Reason is sufficient for. Thus Divines think that tho' Penitence and Amendment are the only natural Means of Reconciliation betwixt an offending Creature, and its offended Creator, and is all that the Creature can do towards it ; yet it is insufficient to answer this Purpose ; and that they, by and through the Microscope of Revelation, have discovered other Means which are both necessary and effectual to answer that End ; which other Means are supplemental to those exhibited by Reason,

Reason, or else exclusive of it: Namely, that a perfectly innocent Being, of the highest Order among intelligent Natures, should personate the Offender, and suffer in his Place and stead, in order to take down the Wrath and Resentment of the Deity against the Criminal, and dispose God to shew mercy to him. However, such a Conduct as this, *viz.* that the Sufferings of the Innocent should dispose an intelligent Being to shew Mercy to the Guilty, the Deist conceives to be both unnatural and improper; and therefore, must be the Produce either of Weakness, or Wickedness; neither of which can be ascribed to God without Blasphemy; that is, without blasting the natural or moral Character of the Deity. That the Sufferings of an innocent Person, whether voluntarily, or from Necessity, should dispose a Being who is absolutely independant, and self-sufficient, and of the most perfect Intelligence (and thereby is out of the Reach of all Temptation to act wrong, nor can he do it unwillingly) to shew Mercy to the Guilty, is altogether as absurd, and as repugnant to Reason in Morals, as it is in things natural that a Creature should create or give Being to itself. It has always been esteemed, by judicious Men, to be a Matter of the greatest Importance to Religion to have worthy and proper Notions of a Deity; whereas the common Notion of Sacrifices, as generally received by Jews and Heathens, and of Redemption among Christians, seems to represent the Deity in a disagreeable

Light, as implacable, revengeful, &c. and as acting contrary to the Sentiments Men have of Wisdom and Goodness, which must necessarily do great Disservice to true Religion. And tho' the Doctrine of God's being reconciled to sinful Men, through the Pain and Misery *Jesus Christ* underwent, may be considered to be supernatural and superrational ; yet it cannot possibly appear to the human Understanding to be a supernatural and a superrational Truth ; and therefore, the Free-thinker finds himself obliged, as he would act consonant to his own intelligent Nature, and as he is satisfied God always acts agreeably to the primary and most perfect Law of Nature, not to give Credit to it. This then, in my Opinion, is a weighty Objection against the Divinity of such Doctrines as are superrational and supernatural ; because they cannot possibly appear to the human Understanding to be supernatural and superrational Truths.

Besides what is given in aid of Reason, is in its Sense and Meaning so very loose and indeterminate, as that of Necessity it must be an uncertain, and thereby an unsafe Guide to Mankind. For tho' both rational and enthusiastic Divines, do all agree to maintain the Necessity of Revelation, and make Use of this common Argument, that as human Reason is greatly limited and imperfect, and has been exceedingly perverted and abused ; so Revelation came in aid of it ; yet, seeing the Interpretations

tations of the several Parts of it are so abundantly various and contradictory, and among the various Interpretations of any Part (be it ever so certain and important a Truth in itself) one only can be the right of the Case, the Question is, what Aid can such an obscure Revelation afford to imperfect human Reason in general, and particularly to the Reason of those, who honestly adhere to any one of the wrong Interpretations, as the only right one, towards advancing it to its supposed primitive Purity and Perfection? To suppose any particular Proposition, necessary in the general to be believed in, whilst we are incapable of understanding what is particularly meant by it; is by Words to pretend we are to believe something, which at the same time we confess to be nothing; that is, it is as if it was not, with regard to any particular rational Conceptions we can have about it. To suppose we are able, and consequently, ought to fix its proper determinate Sense, to each of the difficult Parts of Revelation, or to suppose that Revelation is plain, and easily to be understood, and its true Sense easily to be ascertained in all Points of Importance; is to suppose the Revelation to be, not a superrational, but a rational one; which would be reducing the rational Divines, to the Necessity of looking again upon Reason, as the only Guide in Matters of Religion; and consequently to acquit the Author above referred to of the Charge brought against him, by their Representative *Dr. Benson*, viz. of misrepresenting them.

them. To suppose we are not able to fix to any difficult Part of Revelation its real determinate Sense, and yet to suppose it to have been given by way of supernatural Aid to our natural Faculties, and that those very difficult Parts of Revelation are collectively a glorious additional Talent, for which they who have the Benefit of it are accountable, is to suppose that to be sent in Aid of Reason, which is incapable of affording it any Assistance ; it is to suppose us to be possessed of an additional Talent, that cannot at all increase our original Stock ; and lastly, 'tis to suppose us accountable for the Benefit of what we cannot at all be benefited by. But as things are usually put in a clearer light by giving an Example of the kind, let it be admitted, that the Christian Revelation exhibits to us this Doctrine, namely, that God is distinguishable into three distinct Parts or Somewhats, each of which is characterized by a distinct Name, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; and all of them in Conjunction by the Term Trinity ; the Question is, what natural or moral Improvement does this Exhibition bring with it to Mankind ? and the Answer, I think, is evident, *viz.* none at all. It affords no natural Improvement to the Mind, because the Mind has no proper Idea of what is seemingly exhibited by it, *viz.* That the Deity is distinguishable into three Somewhats. Were this Proposition exhibited to us, by a divine Revelation, *viz.* That there are four secondary Planets moving round the Planet *Jupiter*, this  
might



might be some low Degree of Improvement to a Mind that had no other way to attain to the Knowledge of this Proposition ; because, as here is something proposed to the Mind, of which it has a proper Conception, so by this means it is informed of a Truth, which otherwise it would have been ignorant of. Whereas that the Deity is distinguishable into three Somewhats, as the Mind cannot possibly conceive, or have any proper Idea what this Distinguishment is ; so it cannot possibly receive any Information from it, nor any natural Improvement by it. Nor can Man receive any moral Improvement from the above Doctrine of God's being distinguishable into three distinct Parts, or Somewhats, as aforesaid. For as our Relation to, Dependance upon, and our Obligations to, the Deity, and all just and reasonable Expectations from him, are the very same, whether the Deity be distinguishable into three Somewhats, or not ; and whether Man has received any Information concerning it, or not ; so Man cannot receive any moral Improvement by it ; that is, it does not lead him to a greater, or higher, Degree of Rectitude, of Affection and Action, than otherwise he would attain. And as the aforesaid Doctrine cannot be introductive of any natural or moral Improvement to Man ; so neither can he form any Judgment of the Truth, or Falshood ; of the Good, or Evil of it. Not of its Truth, or Falshood ; because he is altogether ignorant of the Subject, of which it is here supposed that Truth  
or

or Falshood is one or other of them relative to. Not of its Good or Evil ; because Man cannot possibly discover that it is Good in itself, and Good for us, that God is distinguishable as afore-said ; and that it would be Evil in itself, and Evil to us, were the Deity absolutely a simple uncompounded Being. And as this is the Case of the Doctrine referred to, so I apprehend it to be the same with all Doctrines that are properly speaking supernatural and superrational ; they neither furnish the Mind with useful and venerable Truths, nor introduce greater Rectitude of Affection and Action. And this, Sir, is to me a weighty Objection against the Divinity of such Doctrines, and is a Difficulty insolvable to me.

The human Species being accountable, necessarily supposes them to be free Beings, and, as such, to be at liberty either to exercise and cultivate, or to neglect and abuse their Reason ; but that all our Species should exceedingly pervert and abuse it, is unaccountable, and past Belief ; and were it the Case I should be tempted to think it unavoidable, and therefore innocent. That there have been some in all Ages who have cultivated and improved their Reason, and thereby have rendered themselves approvable to God ; and others who have perverted and abused their Reason, and thereby have rendered themselves displeasing to him, and punishable by him, seems to be the Truth of the Case, from the general View Experience

rience gives us of this Matter. But then, that the Perversion and Abuse of Reason, has been much lessened since Revelation came in aid of it, is thought by some to be a Point not quite so clear, as to be admitted without Examination. Those who so much value themselves upon their being possessed of this glorious additional Talent, it does not appear from their Tempers and Actions, from which alone we can form a Judgment concerning them, that they have been so much aided in the right use of their natural Reason, and lessening the Perversion and Abuse of it, as might well be expected from the pompous Representation, and high Character that has been given of it. The learned Dr. *Stillingfleet* says, in his *Irenicum*, “ *If Pride*  
 “ *and Uncharitableness, if Divisions and Strife, if*  
 “ *Wrath and Envy, if Animosity and Contentions,*  
 “ *were but the Marks of true Christians, Diogenes*  
 “ *need never light his Lamp at Noon to find out*  
 “ *such among us ; but if a Spirit of Meekness and*  
 “ *Condescension, if stooping to the Weaknesses and*  
 “ *Infirmities of one-another, if Pursuit after Peace*  
 “ *when it flies from us, be the indispensable Duties*  
 “ *and characteristical Notes of Christians, it may*  
 “ *possibly prove a difficult Inquest to find out such*  
 “ *among the Crowds of those who shelter themselves*  
 “ *under that glorious Name.*” Whoever takes a View of the Christian World, and beholds the abominable Wickedness that has rode in triumph through it, as well in past as present Times ; and observes how the Christian Religion  
 and

and what is called the Christian Revelation have been made a Cover, and a Pretext to the most base and vile Designs, will see the Justness of that melancholy Reflection made by this great Man ; and that if Revelation came in aid of Reason, then there very much needs another Revelation to be given in aid of both. And tho' Christians are apt to boast of the great Benefit that has accrued to Mankind by the Promulgation of the Christian Revelation ; yet it is much to be questioned, whether the poor *Americans* have not too much Reason to consider the coming of Christians and the Christian Religion among them, to have been the greatest Evil or Curse that ever befel them ; and that not only on account of the Millions of People among them, who have fallen a Sacrifice to Christian Piety and Zeal ; but also, on account of that Perfidiousness and Baseness, and that much greater Degeneracy of Affection and Action that has taken place and prevailed among them since the Introduction of Christianity ; and that Misery and Slavery they have been brought into, and which is likely to be rendered perpetual, by the illuminated and improved Disciples of *Jesus Christ* becoming their Masters.

Here, perhaps, it may not be improper to enquire more particularly what is the proper Business of Reason, or what is its natural Province in the great Affair of Religion. And in order to arrive at some good Degree of Satisfaction concerning it,

to accompany Dr. *Benson* through his subsequent Account of it, which he thus introduces: "*As*  
"*to Reason indeed, they*" (that is, the rational Divines) "*cannot allow themselves to blaspheme, or*  
"*speak evil of it; because they look upon it as the*  
"*Candle of the Lord within them, that Gift of God,*  
"*whereby they are rendered wiser than the Fowls of*  
"*the Air, or the Beasts of the Field.*" This Sentence, I apprehend, is intended to inform us, that Reason is that Gift of God which renders us, considered as Animals, superior to the rest of the Animal Creation, in things relating to Animal Life; and considered as Rationals, as the Candle of the Lord within us, by whose Light we are, or may be, enabled to discover him, who is the Fountain of Light, that kindled it in us, and the Paths that lead to his Favour. And if so, then to be sure they are in the right not to speak Evil of it; tho' it is but too notorious, that in their warm Vindications of speculative Christianity, they are oft egregiously guilty of what, we are told by Dr. *Benson*, they do not coolly allow themselves in. Dr. *Benson*, I presume, will hardly exclude Dr. *Manton* from the number of rational Divines, who I shall therefore produce as a melancholy Instance (tho' I believe inconsiderately) of blaspheming and speaking evil of Reason, by greatly depreciating it. The Doctor, having attempted to shew the superlative Excellency of Faith, and that Reason has a just Title to its proper, that is, a secondary Regard, provided it keeps its Place, by being

H

subordinate



subordinate to Faith, proceeds, “ *It*” (that is, Faith) “ *informs us that the Heathens had never* “ *Light enough for Salvation. Their Charity is too* “ *large, who think that the Heathens may be taught* “ *enough by those natural Apostles Sun, Moon, and* “ *Stars. Certainly they are blind in the Work of* “ *Redemption since they are blind to the Work of* “ *Creation. Tho’ God has not left himself without* “ *Witness, Acts xiv. 17. That is, such as may* “ *lead them to God their Creator; yet not to lead* “ *them to God the Redeemer. There is enough given* “ *to the Heathens for Conviction; but not for Con-* “ *version; therefore, all those that God would call* “ *to himself he gave them a higher Light, even the* “ *Revelation of the Word. Tho’ Nature tells us* “ *there is a God; yet what he is, and how to be* “ *worshipped, and how he came to be displeased* “ *with the World, and how he came to be reconcil-* “ *ed, of all this it telleth us nothing. Nature finds* “ *itself depraved, but it knows not the Remedy* “ *and Cure.”* Now tho’ Dr. Benson and a thousand other rational Divines may not carry their Veneration for Faith to so great a height; yet the Instance I have exhibited, and the Difference betwixt the Doctor’s Opinion and that of other rational Divines, touching the State of Heathens, will sufficiently justify me in making the two following Inferences :

I. That we cannot be too cautious of thinking diminutively of Reason, or of exchanging the certain



tain great Advantages we derive from its natural and clear Illuminations, for those we may be tempted to expect from some other, tho' of a supposed supernatural, yet of an obviously indistinct and convulsive Glare ; for would not such an incautious Procedure be a Case analogous to that of the Traveller, who was betrayed into a dangerous Ditch by an *Ignis Fatuus*, whose Guidance he inadvertently chose to follow, before that of the Lamp which he carried in his Hand.

II. How little reason we have to expect a rational and satisfactory Information what it is we are required to understand the Gospel to be ; or to believe with regard to the Number, or the proper and distinct Matter of its peculiar Doctrines ; whilst Divines themselves appear to know so little of, and to differ so widely about it.

But other Divines may do as they please, Dr. *Benson* seemed determined (in the next Sentence that in Order occurs to be considered) to do Justice to Reason, whatever he may do when he changes Sides, and it becomes his immediate Business to treat of, and do honour to Faith. Reason, at present, is the Idol he chuses to bow down to ; *It is, faith he, the inseparable, as well as the peculiar, Glory of every intelligent Being.* And if so, then it must be a sufficient Guide to every intelligent Being in all momentous Affairs ; seeing it does but what is congruous to its Nature, in directing

recting to such a Conduct, as will terminate in his Glory ; and it must be perfectly repugnant to its Nature, to lead him to any thing inglorious to him. So that an intelligent Being can only render himself inglorious, by acting without consulting his Reason, or contrary to its Dictates when consulted ; and therefore, as it is the inseparable and peculiar Glory of, so it is evidently design'd for a constant and ready Guide to, every intelligent Creature. And as there may be a Variety of intelligent Creatures, of whom the Understanding or reasoning Faculty, proper to each Species, has its determinate Extent and Limitation assigned it, by the wise Director of the whole rational Community ; so it is manifestly natural to conclude, that every Individual ought to aspire towards the Perfection of his Nature, by cultivating his own Understanding to the utmost, and bounding it by nothing but that peculiar Extent and Limitation of it, which is fixed to his respective Species. And that it reflects no Dishonour on the general Reason of any particular Species, nor on the Understanding of any Individual of it, when it is found unable to give a Solution to Difficulties insuperable to it, under the respective Limitations fixed to the Species of which the Enquirer is a Member. However, Dr. *Benson* has, in behalf of his Reverend Brethren the rational Divines, made a Concession at once, to the rational Free-thinker, of all that he has ever contended for ; namely, that Reason is first, the Glory ; secondly,

an

an inseparable Glory ; and thirdly, the peculiar Glory, of every intelligent Being. First, if Reason be the Glory of an intelligent Being, it is so because it is that by which alone he is capable of justly arranging his Ideas, and perceiving their Agreement or Disagreement, and thereby of distinguishing betwixt Truth and Falshood, Good and Evil, in all those things in which his Duty and Happiness are concerned ; and consequently, whatever Knowledge is useful in these Respects, it is only to be obtained by the due Use of his Reason or Understanding. Secondly, if Reason be a Glory inseparable from an intelligent Being, it could never, at any time, by any Means, much less by the Transgression of any one Individual of the Species, have been separated from the whole human Race, without sinking the Property of Intelligence to the Species (which is not pretended) because while any one continues an intelligent Being, he must continue to be possessed of every Property essential to Intelligence ; and Reason being so specifically essential to it (in that higher Sense in which Dr. *Benson* uses the Term *Intelligence*) that a Being void of Reason cannot, with any Propriety, be denominated intelligent. And therefore, a Being void of Reason, that is, void of a Capacity of Ratiocination, which will enable him to perceive the Connection or Repugnancy of his own Ideas, when under a proper Arrangement, and to draw just and natural Conclusions from their proper Premisses ; such a Being cannot be accountable

able for the Use or Abuse of a Faculty which he has not ; nor will God expect the Performance of Duties, proper to intelligent Beings, at such a one's Hands. Thirdly, if Reason be the peculiar Glory of every intelligent Being, then it must be the peculiar Glory of the first great Principle of Life and Intelligence. And hence it evidently follows, that if Reason be the peculiar Glory of the Creator, then it must be the peculiar Glory of the Creature, in the respective proportionate Degree in which he possessed it ; and that nothing which he is, or can be possessed of besides, can, abstractedly considered, be equal, much less of superior Glory to him.

Dr. Eenson, having admirably represented the excellent glory of Reason with Regard to intelligent Natures in general, proceedeth to consider it in a more contracted View, and only as relative to Man : “ *Which,*” (that is, Reason) “ *was not* “ *designed, like our Cloaths, to be put on and off at* “ *pleasure ; but was intended for constant and per-* “ *petual Use ; and which we ought to make use of,* “ *not only in the Affairs of this Life, but much more* “ *in religious Affairs, which are of the highest Im-* “ *portance.*” But alas ! tho’ it be a melancholy, it is a most certain Truth, that tho’ Reason was not designed, like our Cloaths, to be put on and off at pleasure, yet some there are, and among these too many Divines, who are of so sanguine and fiery a Temper, that, as Labourers in the Summer  
throw

throw off their Cloaths the better to perform the Task assign'd them, they cast off their Reason, e'er they can fet themselves at Liberty, and qualify themselves to perform the Work they chuse, of reproaching, vilifying, and otherwise using ill their innocent Neighbours, for not blindly submitting to their Dictates. And others again are of so cold a Turn, as not to be content with such Cloathing as the Author of our Beings hath kindly provided for Ornament and Use, *viz.* their Reason ; but will needs veil themselves with Enthusiasm and Superstition ; which Dress being quite unnatural, is superfluous, improper, and deforming. But more melancholy it is to consider, and more surprizing to see some of our great polemical Writers among the rational Divines, cast off their Reason, and assume it again at Pleasure ; play fast and loose, and, in a Sense not the most commendable, become all Things to all Men, that so they may be sure to answer their own private disguised Ends by some. Christianity shall be modelled into any Shape, as the Exigency of the Case shall require. It shall be either a Restoration or Republication of the original Religion of Reason and Nature ; or that together with a new super-added Revelation ; or it shall be the peculiar Doctrines and positive Precepts which constitute the new Revelation, separate from, and exclusive of, natural Religion ; sometimes one, sometimes the other, and as soon again it shall be neither separately, but both in conjunction. So that you scarce  
ever



ever know in what certain determined Sense to understand the Terms as used by them, *viz.* Religion, Christianity, the Gospel, true Piety, saving Faith, &c. And therefore, tho' you come to the Reading of what they exhibit to the World with raised Expectations, and Desires of being informed what the pure and simple Revelation or Gospel of Christ is, in order to determine by your Reason whether it has a Right to the Character it assumes ; after you have, at the Expence of much time, and great Pains and Patience, traced them through their artful Perambulations, you either leave off with your Understanding much in the State as when you began ; or else have Reason with the wise Man to complain, *He that increaseth Knowledge increaseth Sorrow* ; since by your Search and Reading all you have added to your former Stock of Knowledge is only Enthusiasm, or, perhaps, which is still worse, the Priest-craft of the Writer.

As to Dr. *Benson*, of whom I am willing to hope the best, by supposing what may appear exceptionable in his Performance was owing to Inattention, or, perhaps, to a kind of pious Zeal to serve the Common Cause ; I say, as to Dr. *Benson*, it must be acknowledged, that he has paid his Compliments to Reason in an extraordinary manner, by attributing that to it, which, perhaps, is out of its Power to effect ; yet, nevertheless, he has not been without his Backslidings ; for when he has quitted the Charge of Reason, and has made  
Faith



Faith the Subject of his Care, then he changes his Station, and moves gently into the front Rank of the military Church ; and there, amidst its most distinguished Heroes, labours as conspicuously as any, in reducing Reason to an abject slavish Subjection to Faith ; and this involves his Subject in Confusion and Contradiction. Dr. Benson, p. 151, asserts, “ *The more the Works of Creation and Providence are searched into and understood, the more they confirm the Truth of the Christian Revelation ; and add such Supports and Evidences as could hardly be expected or believed.*” Human Reason is the only Faculty, and all that is in Man, by which he can, through his Senses, search into and understand the Works of Creation and Providence ; and as all the Evidence or Proof arising from these, with regard to other things, is not by any kind of Testimony conveyed from them to the Mind by the Senses, but only by its drawing just Conclusions from them as their proper Premises ; so if Man, in the due Exercise of this Faculty, that is, by a careful Inspection into the Works of Creation and Providence, can draw such just Conclusions from them, as give proper Proof of the Truth and Divinity of the Doctrines of the Trinity, the Hypostatic Union, and all such other supernatural and superrational Doctrines and Precepts as constitute the Christian Religion, properly so called ; that is, when contradistinguished from pure simple natural Religion ; then it can work Wonders indeed ; to which I may add the

Doctrine of Transubstantiation, the Truth and Divinity of which, surely, is as proveable from the Works of Creation and Providence, as the others. If human Reason is sufficient for these things, then what is it not sufficient for? Dr. *Benson* says, this is what could hardly be expected or believed; and I think I may venture to say farther, that it is past all Belief. However, let it be applied to the Doctrine of the *Hypostatic Union*. That two distinct intelligent Natures, the one human, the other divine, constitute only one individual Person in *Jesus Christ*; and that this appears to be a divine Truth, by a fair Deduction from the Works of Creation and Providence, is the Question before us. This, I fear, is so far from appearing to be the Case, that the contrary Conclusion is rather deducible from those Premises. According to all the Knowledge we have hitherto obtained, by a careful Inspection into the Works of Creation and Providence, touching intelligent Beings, it seems to appear, that one distinct intelligent Nature constitutes one distinct Person, agreeably to the Idea which is constantly annexed to the Term, Person; and two distinct intelligent Natures, however they may be united in Counsel, Design, Place of Residence, or otherwise, constitute, not one only, but two distinct individual Persons; and therefore, according to Dr. *Butler*, to argue by Analogy, two distinct intelligent Natures, the one human, the other divine, who in their united and social Capacity are characterised by the Terms *Jesus Christ*,  
 must

must constitute two distinct individual Persons ; so that, I am apprehensive, Dr. *Benson* has ascribed to reason what is not in its Power to effect. But tho' Dr. *Benson* has been so over-generous to ascribe to Reason the Ability of discovering, in the Works of Creation and Providence, proper Evidence to prove the Truth and Divinity of the Christian Revelation ; yet at other times he seems, at least, to admit no such thing, but represents Christianity as a Matter of pure Revelation.

By pure Revelation, surely, must be meant, that the Gospel is of such a nature as to be quite out of Reason's Province to form any Judgment about it, much less in the Use of it to discover in the Works of Creation and Providence such Evidences as give proper Proof of its Truth and Divinity ; and therefore Dr. *Benson* commends St. *Paul* for not exercising his Reason or human Learning in the Promulgation of it. In p. 223, he says, "*As the Gospel was a Matter of pure Revelation,*" "*St. Paul was in the right of it not to mix his human Learning with it ; but faithfully to preach the Gospel in that Purity and Simplicity in which he had received it from Christ.*" Here it should seem the Gospel is of so peculiar a nature, that natural Philosophy or human Learning cannot be exercised about it, without corrupting and defiling it ; and therefore, it cannot be capable of drawing Conclusions from any Quarter, much less from the Works of Creation and Providence to support  
and

and maintain it. But admitting Dr. *Benson*, in this his Zeal for the Gospel, has, as it were, gone beyond himself, and has carried the Matter too far; and that, notwithstanding what he has here said, Reason is capable of drawing such Conclusions from the Works of Creation and Providence in favour of Christianity, as aforesaid; then St. *Paul*'s not using it to answer that Purpose, must render him not commendable, but on the contrary, greatly blameable. When St. *Paul* went from Place to Place, preaching the Gospel at *Thessalonica*, at *Berea*, and elsewhere, nothing could have been more proper, nor was better adapted to answer the Purpose of his Ministry, viz. the working the Conviction and Conversion of his Hearers, than for him to have exemplified his human Wisdom and Skill in Natural Philosophy, by drawing those Conclusions, and thereby producing those Evidences from the Works of Creation and Providence as proved the Truth and Divinity of what he exhibited to his respective Audiences: I say, nothing could have been more proper than this, because, as it would have been in some measure an Appeal to the Understandings of his Hearers, with respect to the Truth of what he delivered to them, against which an Objection from the Quarter of Reason could scarcely have lain; so it would have been a solid Foundation for the Faith of his Converts to have rested upon. St. *Paul*, therefore, seems to have been quite in the wrong not to have produced to his attentive Audience, on such proper

per Occasions, those immoveable Supports of the Christian Religion, which it is capable of being furnished with from the Works of Creation and Providence ; because these would have been incontestible Evidences of its Truth to them, it would at once have answered all their reasonable Expectations, and probably have induced their Assent. Thus to have founded Revelation in Nature, and exhibited to Mankind the Supports upon which it permanently rests, by the Instrumentability of human Literature, under the Direction of human Reason, would have been, not barely to have asserted, or proposed to confirm it by mere Power ; but beyond all Contradiction have proved it to be fixed upon a Rock, against which all Objections brought from Reason would have been dashed and dissipated, like the impotent Waves of a turbulent Sea. Besides, this would have been dealing with Mankind suitable to their intelligent Natures, it would have been an Appeal to their Understandings, requiring their Assent in a proper way, and binding them with the Cords of a Man ; whereas to have demanded their Assent authoritatively, or to have extorted by Menaces and Threatnings (*He that believeth not shall be damned*) or by Acts of Power, by subverting the settled Laws of Nature, striking the Mind with Wonder and Astonishment, and thereby affecting the Passions ; this was not dealing with Men, as Men, but rather like Horses and Asses that have no Understanding capable of rational Conviction, whose Mouths must be held with



with Bit and Bridle, must be guided and restrained by Acts of Power only.

Again, Dr. Benson says, p. 27, “ *Are not these*  
 “ *moral Virtues (which are the principal things in*  
 “ *Christianity) the very things which all true Phi-*  
 “ *losophy has ever attempted to recommend. Could*  
 “ *any thing be more worthy of God than giving Men*  
 “ *such a Revelation; when Men had confessedly cor-*  
 “ *rupted themselves, and that to such a Degree, that*  
 “ *not only Reason or the Light of Nature was alto-*  
 “ *gether unlikly to restore true Piety; but even that*  
 “ *Light itself (as Tully expressly acknowledges) did*  
 “ *no where appear? Does not such a Revelation*  
 “ *highly conduce to the Happiness of Mankind, if*  
 “ *Virtue be their Dignity, Perfection and Happi-*  
 “ *ness, as it undoubtedly is?*” But in p. 134 he  
 quotes, from the Author he was answering, the fol-  
 lowing Words, [When Christianity appeared, it  
 was an enquiring Age.] To which he answers,  
 “ *Suppose we allow it, as we readily do, what then?*  
 “ *what could he infer from that?*” To which I re-  
 ply, Tho’ we may not know what that Author  
 would infer, yet it is very easy to see what he  
 could not, viz. he could not infer that Men had  
 corrupted themselves to such a degree, that Rea-  
 son or the Light of Nature did no where appear.  
 He proceeds, “ *The Gospel spread in that enquiring*  
 “ *Age, when (as he asserts) Reason was in the highest*  
 “ *Request and Reputation, and spread with most amaz-*  
 “ *ing Swiftnefs. This, one would think, was one great*  
 “ *Proof*



“ *Proof of its Reasonableness and Excellence, con-*  
 “ *sidering the Means and Methods that were taken*  
 “ *to spread it, which were all fair and equitable, be-*  
 “ *ing an Appeal to the Reason and Understandings*  
 “ *of Men.*” Dr. *Benson* particularly subjoins,  
 “ *But some Authors can argue any way.*” This,  
 indeed is an obvious Truth, of which, it happens,  
 we need not go far for an Instance. In that Dr.  
*Benson* has averred, that the Gospel is a Matter of  
 pure Revelation ; and also that the principal things  
 in Christianity, are the very things which all true  
 Philosophy has ever attempted to recommend.  
 Again, he informs us, that the World was in that  
 profound Darkness when Christianity first made  
 its Appearance in it, that Reason, or the Light of  
 Nature did no where appear ; and yet, he informs  
 us, it every where shone forth in that remarkable  
 happy Age, with such Resplendency and Lustre  
 that Reason was in the highest Request and Re-  
 putation. Good God ! is such Confusion possible ?  
 Thus roundly to assert both Sides of a Contradic-  
 tion, is, it must be owned, an Indication of an  
 Author’s Capacity for arguing any way ; but then  
 it seems, at the same time, to be strangely exposing  
 both his Character and his Cause to very scurvy  
 Consequences. And, I think, I may with the  
 greatest Justice observe, that Dr. *Benson*, can dis-  
 fer from no true Deist, without differing from him-  
 self at the same time ; and directly contradicting  
 in one Part of his smooth Dialogue, what he lays  
 down for a certain Postulatum in another. And  
 by

by so doing (with Concern I speak it) 'tis undeniable, this Christian Advocate does but too much copy after those culpable Apologists for Christianity, who, like him, in Words condemn, what in the self-same Performances, in the face of the World, they are not ashamed to practise, namely, use their Reason as their Cloaths, put it on and off at pleasure.

Dr. *Benson* proceeds, “ *But (Reason) was intended for constant and perpetual Use.*” And would to God we did constantly regard, and perpetually concur in so benign an Intention. He continues: “ *And which we ought to make use of, not only in the Affairs of this Life, but much more in religious Affairs, which are of the highest Importance.*” But, surely, those Gentlemen cannot without blushing assert, that Reason was intended for constant and perpetual Use, who maintain that some of those religious Affairs, that are of the highest Importance to us, are even yet Matters of pure Revelation. For whatever Foundation they may possibly have in the abstract Reason of things, yet as they are out of the Reach of human Reason, and therefore are incommunicable to it, so Reason must be perpetually useless with regard to them. And tho’ it might reasonably be expected that whatever is given in Aid of Reason, should henceforward become familiar to, and be the proper Object of the thus assisted human Understanding; yet, alas! it appears, in the Conclusion,

sion, to be no such Matter ; but on the contrary, when they are stript of all imposed Colourings, and artificial Disguises, they are found to be so involved in Clouds and thick Darknes, as to stand (after all the explanatory Pother made about them) absolutely unrevealed, in the midst of Revelation. Perhaps it may be objected, that tho' the enthusiastic may, the rational Divines have no need to blush on this account, seeing they have undertaken to prove the Christian Doctrines reasonable ; and that it is for this reason the Epithet, *rational*, is appropriated to them, in Contradistinction to such as maintain the Christian Doctrines to be above Reason, and meer Matters of Faith : I answer, it must indeed be owned that many have undertook it, but no one, at least that I have yet met with, has made good his Undertaking. To instance in Dr. *Benson*, who, in his turn, has likewise attempted it, (see p. 21) but, I apprehend, with no better Success than those who have gone before him. For after a magnificent Introduction of Doctrines proper and peculiar (not to Revelation, but) to natural Religion, he slides in some that are peculiarly Christian ; which, surely, are never the more reasonable in themselves, nor are they proved to be so, by being placed among those that are. However, they are put in, having the Chance of passing in the Crowd for such ; tho' whether they are, or not, will best appear by an impartial Consideration and Trial of them. Dr. *Benson* draws his In-

troduction composed of moral Doctrines towards  
 a Conclusion with this Sentence, “ *That he (viz.  
 “ God) created Man in his own Image ;*” and then  
 instantly shifts the Scene, and proceeds, — “ *And  
 “ that when Mankind degenerated into Ignorance,  
 “ Idolatry, and Vice, he sent among them his only  
 “ begotten, and most well beloved Son.*” And after  
 relating the End of his coming into the World, his  
 exemplary Behaviour, Sufferings and Death, and  
 that he was remarkably rewarded, he proceeds to  
 inform us, That, “ *as by him God made the World ;  
 “ so by him he now governs all things, and that he  
 “ will at last by him raise the Dead ; and then asks,  
 “ Are not all these things highly reasonable ?*” as if  
 the bare Relation was a Demonstration, and there  
 is not a single Difficulty now remaining ; whereas  
 the Sum total of his Proof amounts to no more  
 than this, that he has mixed and compounded his  
 supernatural and superrational Doctrines with na-  
 tural Religion, and then attributes that to the  
 whole, which for any thing that appears, is pro-  
 per and peculiar to a Part only ; and thus he would  
 seem to carry his Point, viz. prove the Christian  
 Doctrines to be all reasonable. And this leads me  
 to put those Questions, viz. Where is the Man,  
 the Christian, the Believer, who durst, on Prin-  
 ciples of pure Reason, attempt, so as to convince  
 the Understanding of another Man, that an unori-  
 ginated, uncompounded, immaterial and pure Spi-  
 rit, should, like one of the derived, compounded,  
 material human Species, have a Son ? that he  
 should

should be a begotten Son? that he should be his only begotten Son? What we are determinately to understand by the Terms *begotten* and *only begotten*, as applied by finite Creatures to an infinitely perfect Mind; which Creatures, when they apply those Terms to themselves, they use them to signify a Species of Action of their own, so grossly sensual, as to be impossible literally to relate or be applicable to a Being purely immaterial? Why God who is infinitely happy, and all-sufficient in himself, and therefore seems to have no Inducement on his own account, should beget a Son? Why it should be deemed requisite for God to beget a Son on our account; that by him God might become placable and merciful to us, when Placability or a Disposition to shew Mercy to the proper Objects of Mercy is his very Nature? I say, where is the Man, the Christian, the Believer that can so much as discern himself, much more convincingly communicate to another, the Reasons that constitute the Truth of these Doctrines? And which are absolutely necessary to be done by him who indeed proves the Truth of them not authoritatively, but by Arguments drawn from Reason. And if there be no such Person, then I cannot but infer first, that these Doctrines are not reasonable; or, at least, cannot be proved to be so, which comes to the same in the present Case. Secondly, That those Divines who fondly distinguish themselves by the sonorous Appellative, *rational*, have much more Reason than others to blush, because they publicly maintain and defend unintelligible Propositions,



sitions, and fain would pass them upon the World as rational, without so much as attempting to shew or prove them to be such; which is the very thing the Character they assume of being rational Divines obliges them to make good. Thirdly, That as Dr. *Benson*, after he had just related the Doctrines referred to, contented himself with barely asking, Are not these things highly reasonable? without proving them to be so, which was his Point, he, too much like his Predecessors, left his Work just as he found it. It must be acknowledged indeed that Dr. *Benson* does not desist from his unequal Undertaking unbecoming a Man of Breeding, but takes his leave, for the present, of his disappointed Reader, and most stubborn Subject, with a very handsome Apology, perhaps, as good as could be made upon the Occasion. “ *I forbear enlarging*” (says he) “ *for fear I should seem tedious, and therefore hasten to the Precept; which must be acknowledged to be in all respects most excellent, every way worthy of God, and suited to recover fallen Man to Virtue and Happiness.*” The Author, Dr. *Benson* undertook to answer, attempted to prove that Christianity is not founded on Reason or Argument; and Dr. *Benson*, as his Answerer, took upon him to prove that Christianity is founded on Reason or Argument; but when some of those Doctrines that are peculiarly Christian were brought upon the Carpet, and it became the Doctor’s present Business to shew or prove them to be all reasonable, that being the professed Design of his Book, he then (after just relating them)



them) only puts the Question, Are not all these things highly reasonable? and there he stops with this Excuse, He forbore to enlarge, for fear he should seem tedious; when his not enlarging made his Book, with regard to the profest primary Design of it, to be all Waste-Paper, and a most unreasonable Taxation on the Time and Patience, and on the Pockets of his Readers. Dr. *Benson*, surely, is of a tender Constitution, and his Passions are quickly to be alarmed; he forbore to enlarge, for fear he should seem tedious. When the Doctor faced the Enemy, and it came to his turn to charge them home, his Heart failed him, the coming to a close Engagement seemed a Task too mighty and hazardous for him, and might be of fatal Consequence; and this, probably, was the true Ground of the Panic he fell into, and which hurried him on to make his Escape, with all possible Speed, he hastened to the Precepts. The very manner of his Expression here implies somewhat of Surprise and Confusion, and a Consciousness of having proposed to wade beyond his Depth. His Conduct exactly resembles that of a Man who, timely observing himself on a sudden and unexpectedly gotten into a Place of Danger, delays not to hasten from it, to a Place of known Security; he hastened to the Precepts: What Precepts? why the moral Precepts, and here he is certainly safe; and I am naturally so delighted with the Safety of others, that I cannot help congratulating him on his having again recovered sound Ground. Now Dr. *Benson's*  
Business

Business is (as the Margin informs us) to prove the moral Precepts of the New Testament reasonable. Here his way is all plain, and his Path strait before him; and, indeed, the Work is done to his Hand, for were not the Precepts referred to reasonable, they would not come under the Denomination of moral Precepts. Here Dr. *Benson* dares be bold, and affirms of the moral Precepts, that they are most excellent; whereas with respect to the Doctrines of Christianity he dares not venture farther, after just giving a Relation of them, than asking the Question, Are not all these highly reasonable? The moral Precepts, it must be acknowledged, are in all Respects most excellent; every way worthy of God, and suited to recover fallen Man to Virtue and Happiness; whether held forth in the Old Testament, or the New; in past, or present times; whether in this Part of the World, or any other. Dr. *Benson*, in page 26, has carried the Compliment to moral Virtues or Precepts still higher, and says they are the principal things in Christianity; which is likewise, I think, a very extraordinary, tho' a very just Compliment to his Antagonists, the Deists; whose Religion consists entirely in, and is composed solely of, moral Virtues, that is, the Belief of evident moral Doctrines, and the Practice of moral Duties, and seems not a little to depreciate Christianity itself; because if moral Virtues are the principal things in Christianity, then they have a just Title to our highest Regard, and all other things in Christianity

(which

(which other Things are all that is Christianity properly so called) can have at best a Claim but to a secondary and subordinate Regard. And here it is to be observed, that Dr. *Benson*, in order to render Christianity amiable, decks her with the graceful Ornament of moral Precepts or Virtues, which are but borrowed Ware; and then he becomes the Trumpeter of her Praise. Moral Virtues, it is true, are most excellent; but what then? moral Virtues have not Christianity for their Parent, but are the neat Produce and the genuine Offspring of Reason and Nature, and were equally excellent and valuable before Christianity took place, and ever was, and will be the same whether Christianity ever had been or not. How proposterous must it therefore be for Dr. *Benson* to lugg moral Virtues into the Case, when the Author he undertook to answer did not pretend to prove that moral Virtues, but only that Christianity is not founded on Reason or Argument; moral Virtues being as distinct from Christianity, as Christianity is from Mahometanism. The Author referred to, did not pretend to prove that this Precept, *viz. Render to all their Due*, is not founded on Argument; but only that Christianity properly so called, that is, when contradistinguished from natural Religion, is not thus founded. This then is the Sum total of Dr. *Benson's* bulky Answer; he gives to, and takes from Reason as he pleases. When he is pressed in Argument, and the Case requires that he should prove his Point, he forbears

bears to enlarge, for fear he should seem tedious ; and he puts upon his Customers borrowed Wares ; that is, he puts upon his Readers, moral Precepts, or natural Religion, as Christianity, properly so called, and reasons from it as if it were such.

Perhaps you will say, this is carrying the Matter too far, and much beyond what Dr. *Benson* intended. If this should be the Case, I am not blameable, and he must thank himself for drawing me into Errors ; for if I have carried the Argument no farther than it will naturally bear ; if I have only attended it where it has apparently gone, then I have only done Justice to the Subject ; and whether I have, or no, I leave to your candid Consideration. However, I think Dr. *Benson* must be allowed to be somewhat perplexed and confused in his Account of the Gospel. Suppose from among the undetermined and indefinite Number of Doctrines offered by him, as a Revelation from God, in the Scripture for me to assent to, I single out this one, viz. That God has a begotten Son ; I would ask Dr. *Benson*, How shall I know whether this Doctrine be a divine Revelation or not ? Why, says he, you are to try it. But I ask, What Principle I am possessed of capable of guiding me aright in a Matter of such Importance ? He answers, Your Reason. By our Reason we are to judge of the Nature and Evidence of what is proposed to us, under the Notion of a divine Revelation. Well then, I may safely depend on my Reason

Reason to guide me aright in this Case, may I not? Surprising! no such Matter, Reason after all is by no means singly to be confided in; it is not the only Guide in Matters of Religion; but Reason and Scriptures are both to be regarded. Surely this Method of vindicating the divine Authority of all the Parts of Scripture severally, and the same several Parts conjunctively, as a particular and special Revelation from God, cannot in Reason be expected should be attended with the proposed Effect, namely, the Conviction of the Deists of its Truth, by fair Reasoning; because this, as I conceive, is a fair or plain Contradiction. But tho' I differ from Dr. *Benson* here, where he does not agree with himself; yet I have the Pleasure of agreeing with him elsewhere, *viz.* when he is pleased to assert the Rights and Abilities of Reason, and consistently to prove and maintain them, as in the following Sentences: “ *By our Reason we*  
“ *are to make Trial of what is offered to us as a*  
“ *Revelation from God; otherwise, how should we*  
“ *distinguish between the Koran of Mahomet, and*  
“ *the Bible? By our Reason we are to judge of the*  
“ *Nature and Evidence of what is proposed to us*  
“ *under the Notion of a divine Revelation; that we*  
“ *may carefully distinguish the true Revelation from*  
“ *all pretended and false ones. In the Use of our*  
“ *Reason or Understanding we are to study that Re-*  
“ *velation, and find out the Scope and Connection,*  
“ *and the Meaning of the Words and Sentences, that*  
“ *we may know what is revealed, or what it con-*



“ tains. For where there is no Idea, there can be  
 “ no Assent ; because that would be assenting to no-  
 “ thing ; and assenting to nothing, is exactly the  
 “ same thing as not assenting at all. Our Assent can  
 “ reach no farther than our Ideas of what we are to  
 “ receive ; nor properly rise higher than the Proofs  
 “ or Evidences upon which we are to yield our As-  
 “ sent.” This, Sir, according to Dr. Benson, is  
 the Part that Reason is to act in the great Affair  
 of Religion, so far as Revelation is concerned in  
 the Matter ; with respect to which, Reason has a  
 plain and a certain Rule to go by. For whatever  
 upon a fair Trial appears to be cognizable by,  
 consonant to, and is founded in Reason and Na-  
 ture, all such things Reason pronounces to be  
 Truths, and if you please, divine Truths, (using  
 the Term *divine* in the loose improper Sense ad-  
 mitted above) but if upon enquiry it appears to be  
 above, or repugnant to Reason, or not founded  
 therein, then Reason pronounces it not divine.  
 And this is the Test all Revelations must be  
 brought to, and be tried by, whether the Koran of  
*Mahomet*, or the Bible of Christians ; in order  
 carefully to distinguish true Revelation from all  
 pretended and false ones. If the Koran is to be  
 judged by this Standard, then all such Doctrines  
 and Duties contained therein (supposing there are  
 such) as plainly appear to be cognizable by, con-  
 sonant to, and are founded in Reason and Nature,  
 these, Reason pronounces to be a divine Revelation  
 and the Word of God, using the Terms in the  
 loose



loose improper Sense before mentioned ; and all such Doctrines, Precepts, and Parts of the Koran as, upon a fair Trial, appear to be either not cognizable by, or repugnant to, or not founded in Reason and Nature, these it pronounces not divine. The Case is the same of the Bible of Christians, and all other Revelations when brought to the Bar, and are tried by the Standard of human Reason. The same Part Reason is to act in finding out the Sense to be fixed upon any Revelation ; and in adjudging of the Weight of the Evidence upon which it is supposed to be grounded. No arbitrary Determination is to be admitted, but every thing is to be approved, or rejected, according as it plainly appears to be grounded upon, or consonant to Reason or the contrary. And in these Cases Reason is not in part, but the sole Judge. If I examine the Koran, and try if it be of divine Revelation, would it not be greatly absurd to say that Reason is not the only Guide, the only Judge ; but Reason and the Koran are both to be regarded. And would it not be equally as absurd with respect to the Bible to say, that it must be equally regarded with Reason, when the Bible itself is the very thing to be tried, and upon which Judgment is to be given. Surely, this Sentence, *viz. Reason is not the only Guide in Matters of Religion ; and that Reason and Scripture are both to be regarded ;* was introduced to save Appearances, or, possibly, it may have been considered as a decent Retreat into Mystery and Darknes, whither Reason cannot follow.

However,

However, if Dr. *Benson* or any other Divine, whether rational, irrational, or enthusiastic will be pleased to come fairly and fully into this Question, and shew plainly and distinctly what Part it is which Scripture is to bear, in distinguishing and judging of religious and revealed Matters, I assure you, Sir, it shall carefully and candidly be considered.

In the mean time, I will apply Dr. *Benson's* Reasoning in favour of Reason, and the Use of it in religious and revealed Matters to the Christian Doctrine mentioned above, *viz.* that God has a begotten Son. And after the closest Application I am capable of, I neither have, nor can form any Idea of the Deity's begetting a Son; what then is the Consequence, why according to Dr. *Benson*, and I beg leave to add the Nature of the thing also, I must disbelieve and reject it. For, as he judiciously argues, our Assent can reach no farther than our Ideas of what we are to receive; nor properly arise higher than the Proofs or Evidences upon which we are to yield our Assent. This Doctrine then of God's having a begotten Son, being out of the Reach of our discerning Faculty, and not having any Evidence or Proof from Reason or Nature to support it, cannot be the Object of our Faith, upon the Principles before laid down; seeing whatever Proofs or Evidences may be brought from Scripture, they are all insignificant in the present Argument, as the divine Authority of the  
Scriptures

Scriptures themselves are here allowed to depend solely upon the internal Excellency and apparent Truth and Reasonableness of its Doctrines, in all doctrinal Matters. But for Argument sake, let it be admitted, that the supreme Deity, an absolutely pure Spirit, did beget a Son; and then I am still equally at a loss for a Reason or Reasons which should restrain the Deity from begetting more Sons than one. If God begat one Son, then why not an infinite Race of infinite Beings? If the begetting of one Son was the Effect of an essential Propensity in the divine Nature, that Propensity could not be destroyed nor diminished by a single Gratification or Exertion of it, but must continue to exist in God in all its infinite Force, and to be equally as essential to him after the begetting of one Son, or many Sons as before; and therefore, its being exhibited to us in, and by the Christian Revelation that God has one, and only one begotten Son, furnishes an Argument, in Reason, against his having any begotten Son at all. If it should be said, that we can have no distinct Idea of God's begetting a Son; and therefore, we can draw no certain Conclusions from it; this is granted, except it obviously carries with it an Absurdity or Contradiction, which may be the present Case. If then I have no Idea of a Doctrine which owes its Rise to the Christian Revelation, and it is agreed that where there is no Idea, there can be no Assent; were I to declare my Assent to it, as the Gentlemen do, who pique themselves on the

Character

Character of Rational Divines, upon what Principles could I do it? Principles of real Religion, Reason and Truth? Certainly whatever Principles it could be upon, it could not possibly be upon these; for the Dr. to affirm then, That “by our Reason we are to make a Tryal of what is offered to us as a Revelation from God.—By our Reason we are to judge of the Nature and Evidence of what is proposed to us under the Notion of a divine Revelation, &c.” is evidently all Parade and Flourish, seeing they embrace and vindicate not only this, but many other Doctrines of the Christian Revelation, which, upon the fairest Trial of Reason possible, we find we can form no rational Idea or Conception about. To what End would these Gentlemen propose the Study of those dark Parts of Revelation? For when we have found out the Scope, and Connection, the literal and grammatical Meaning of the Words, such as what is meant by the Term *begetting*, when applied to human Generation, what End have we then answered? Do we then know certainly what is meant by the Words thus exhibited? that is, have we any proper distinct Idea of God’s having a begotten Son? Most certainly nothing less, as is demonstrable from the Perplexity Christians have been in concerning it, from the first Appearance of Christianity to this time; the Learned and the Illiterate, the Teacher and the Taught alike. What those bad Consequences

quences are which the studying those unsearchable Parts of Revelation has been the Parent of, those who are at all acquainted with Church-History cannot be Strangers to. And this, according to my Conception of things, carries with it the Weight and Force of an Argument against the Divinity of such Doctrines and Parts of Revelation, or what is exhibited to the World as such ; they cannot possibly answer any good End, and they not only may, but also constantly have answered very bad Purposes to Mankind. For as those Doctrines have been perpetually the occasion of Contention among Christians ; so they have been productive of Slandering, Reproaches, and much Evil-speaking ; of Excommunications, Banishments, and all kind of Persecutions ; and indeed of almost every evil Word and Work. And how then is it to be conceived, that the Father of Lights and the Fountain of Goodness should exhibit that to his Creatures, which can only be subservient to their Hurt ? If indeed we regulate our Studies by the genuine Prescriptions of Reason, we can only make choice of such Subjects as are probably cognizable by our Reason, and worthy of our rational Nature. For then, as we shall not study what is irrational on the one hand, because it is both beneath and destructive of the Dignity of our rational Nature, and the End for which it was conferred on us, *viz.* rational Happiness ; so we shall not study what is superrational on the other hand, because it would be idle and insignificant, as the Knowledge of the  
thing



thing studied is, in the Nature of it, absolutely unattainable. The Study of the former therefore can properly be contended for, only by the Libertine and Sensualist ; the latter by the Visionary and Enthusiast.

Dr. *Benson* having rationally declared, that by our Reason we are to make Trial of what is offered to us as a Revelation from God, he judiciously puts the Question, otherwise how shall we distinguish between the Koran of *Mahomet* and the Bible. And granting, as the Deist readily does, that by our Reason we are to distinguish between one traditionary Revelation and another in the general ; I ask, unless there be some one Revelation in particular to be produced, that is consonant to Reason in all its Parts, and which alone can lay a Foundation for such Comparison, must we not by our Reason likewise distinguish between the varying, incoherent and unintelligible Parts of each (supposing there are such Parts, and Parts that are otherwise) and particularly that which is the received one in the Country in which God has appointed us our Residence ? Certainly if by our Reason we are to make trial of what is offered to us as a Revelation from God ; then we are more especially obliged to make trial by our Reason of all the Parts and Branches of that Revelation which is particularly and directly offered to us as such. Vast Numbers both of Christians and Mahometans have no Opportunity of making a Comparison, and  
thereby



thereby of distinguishing between the Koran and the Bible ; who are, notwithstanding, capable of closely and judicially examining either of these with which they are particularly concerned, whether it be the Koran, or the Bible. We can readily suppose that a Mahometan (notwithstanding his peculiar Prejudices arising from Education, Prepossession, Superstition, and constant Conversation with Persons bigotted to, and interested in the Prevalence and Prosperity of the received Revelation of his own Country) ought, as a rational Being, to reason with himself in this, or some such like Soliloquy.

The Koran is recommended to me by Priests, Friends and Relations, and is universally esteemed by my Country-men all around me to be an immediate Revelation from God, by our holy Prophet *Mahomet*. God, I am fully satisfied, is a Being that is infinitely perfect in himself, and is the Source of all that Order, Wisdom, and Perfection that every where appear in his Works ; nothing therefore that is obviously weak, confused, and imperfect can be a Revelation from him to us his reasonable Creatures ; and if he certainly requires me to believe the Inspiration of the Koran, then he as certainly requires it only as I am rationally convinced of it, upon the closest Examination. It is to him I owe that I am made a reasonable Creature, and to him I am indebted for that specific Difference made betwixt the Species to which I

M

belong

belong and all other animal Beings upon this Globe ; and by this distinguishing Principle, *viz.* my Understanding or Reason, I am informed it is my indispensable Duty to be always cultivating my rational Nature, by all possible Means, till I arrive as near Perfection as my present imperfect State will admit. And if God has indeed vouchsafed to give a supernatural Revelation of his Will to Men, by any Individual of them, then it must needs be most admirably cultivated to answer this End, *viz.* the perfecting human Nature ; and therefore, will be readily distinguished from all pretended and false Revelations that are intended to answer other Purposes, by appearing to be in all its Parts every way worthy of God as its Parent, and well adapted to answer the forementioned End. All the Parts of it must, and will be such as my Understanding devoid of Prejudice, Prepossession and base Views, will be not only capable of perceiving, but will naturally assent to. A Directory for my Conduct given of God, and which comes immediately from him, surely, if but duly consulted and attended to, must be a Means of Improvement in Wisdom, Purity, and every worthy Quality which is an Ornament to a rational Being. For as on the one hand, it can have nothing in it correspondent to human Frailty, Weakness, or Folly ; so on the other hand, it must be as remote from that Confusion of Ideas and Ambiguity of Expression which human Compositions at least are liable to. That infinite Being who gave Existence

to

to the Power of Conception in the human Mind, and curiously modelled the Organs of Speech in the human Body, must naturally be supposed to express his own most clear and perfect Conceptions with all that Perspicuity and Sublimity which is natural or suitable to a divine Production. Perfect Rectitude will no more fail suitably to prescribe, exactly to express, and nicely to apply, than perfect Intelligence to discern the most natural and proper Means to accomplish an End. And therefore, as certain as a Being of perfect Rectitude has given a Revelation; so certain it is that not any thing in that Revelation can be found, upon a strict Enquiry, to remain unrevealed; that is, not understood by such an Enquirer; especially this cannot be the Case to Men of Learning, Penetration, Diligence and Integrity. To suppose what is thus enquired into, may yet remain unrevealed; carries with it such a high Reflection, either upon the natural, or moral Character of the Deity, as implies a want of Ability or Inclination to inform his Creatures of what he directly proposed to inform them of; which Conduct would be greatly improper. How then can I esteem the Koran in the whole to be a divine Revelation, when I find in it many Matters, which not only I myself cannot understand, at least in any Sense reconcilable with the undoubted Reason, Propriety and Truth of Things; but our greatest and most learned Doctors are evidently equally ignorant of, as appears from their explaining them in direct contrary

trary Senses. And as this appears to me to be the Case, so I cannot avoid drawing the following Conclusions from it, *viz.*

If my Reason was intended by the Deity to be informed and improved by a Revelation from him, then these Parts of the Koran having no such Tendency, can be no Part of a true, a divine Revelation. If my Reason was intended for constant and perpetual Use, especially in religious Affairs, which are of the highest Importance, as certainly it must appear to be, if I consider myself under the Character of a rational Creature; then a real Revelation from God must actually reveal, open, or explain to my Reason and Understanding all the several Subjects, Matters or Parts which collectively compose it; seeing my Understanding is the only Power or Principle in me which can be any way useful to me in enquiring into, and discovering the Particulars revealed; but those Parts of the Koran are of such a nature as to render my Understanding altogether useless to me with regard to them; therefore, they can be no Parts of a true, a divine, Revelation. If by my Reason I am to make Trial of what is offered to me as a Revelation from God, as I certainly must; then those Parts of the Koran which I can form no definitive Judgment of, or if I could, yet not without pronouncing them weak and unworthy of the Deity, such Parts cannot possibly be a Revelation from him. If by my Reason I am to make Trial of what is offered to me

as

as a Revelation from God, and yet on a fair and unprejudiced Trial I do not reject every thing as divine Revelation which appears to be either out of Reason's Power to form any Judgment of, or to be actually incongruous with it ; then I plainly defeat the very End for which I am to make such a Trial, and must, consequently, become obnoxious to the divine Resentment on that Account. I am therefore, I plainly perceive, to esteem those Parts of the Koran only to be a divine Revelation, and admit them as such, which on the most impartial Trial I find to be worthy of God, agreeable to his known Perfections, and to the Reason, Truth, and Property of things.

A conscientious Mahometan reasoning with himself in some such manner as this, concerning the immediate Inspiration of the Koran in general, and of the unintelligible and absurd Parts of it in particular, is what there are but few Christians but would admit to be a truly rational, proper, and commendable Conduct. And every one sees the natural Consequence of such an impartial Behaviour, and unprejudiced Trial of the Koran by Reason. Such a Man would retain a Veneration for those Parts of the Koran only, that stood the Test of Reason, and would reject, as well what was to him absolutely unintelligible, as what was evidently absurd and ridiculous. And the Nature and Propriety of Things would, surely, be allowed by Christians to be a proper Standard for a Mahometan



metan to frame the Decisions of his Reason, and form a Judgment upon the Koran by; and he would of himself be allowed to be capable of clearly perceiving by his own Understanding what is proper for him, and what he ought to do under such Circumstances. Reason, in the present Case, would be the Man's only Guide in Matters of Religion and divine Revelation; nor, surely, would any orthodox Christian object against such a Conduct in a Mahometan; much less would he say, that the Mahometan's Scripture, *viz.* the Koran ought to have been regarded by him, in forming his Judgment upon the Koran as aforesaid. And should an orthodox Mahometan object against such a Procedure as mentioned above, and say, that Reason is not the only Guide in Matters of Religion, but that Reason and the Koran are both to be regarded; and that without the Koran Mens natural Faculties could never have found out many things that are revealed in their Scriptures; and yet at the same time should maintain, that by our Reason we are to make Trial of what is offered to us as a Revelation from God, whether in the Koran or elsewhere, such a Mahometan would, no doubt, be universally condemned by Christians as guilty of a Conduct most notoriously inconsistent and preposterous. Now Mahometans and Christians, as Creatures of the same Species, and as intelligent rational Beings are on a level, they stand in the same relation to God, are alike his Offspring, and the Objects of his Care and Protection; they

have

have a Principle of Discernment, and a Rule of Judgment which is common to all ; why then should it be supposed that a Revelation which is peculiarly in the Possession of one, should be examined and judged of by any other Principle than what is in the Possession of, and is a common Standard of Truth to all ? or why should either Part fondly suppose their heavenly Father who regards them as his sensitive Creatures, so as to render their present Existence upon the whole a Blessing to them, wherever the Place of their Residence be, whether here or there upon this Earth ; I say, why should either Party fondly suppose their common Parent would partially furnish one with, and arbitrarily deny the other the Knowledge of such supposed supernatural Truths which they respectively boast of, as the peculiar Signatures of Regard to them, and their greater Interest in another World, if the Knowledge of any such Matters was in Reality of Importance to one, or the other ? If either, or both of these Parties should say, that the particular Revelation each one is in the Possession of, was kindly intended to be a general Benefit, and for the greatest Good of all ; then what substantial Reason can there be assigned why that kind Hand of Providence which gave it forth, and has put it into the Possession of some, does not alike exert itself, and put it alike into the Hands of all, that so all may share in those Benefits which were thus kindly intended for them.

If it were a proper Object of the Hopes of Men considered as Men, methinks, it should as reasonably, and ought as much, to be hoped for by all, as by a few of us : for the same Service it would be of to some, it would certainly be of to others, to all. If it were indeed necessary to the Salvation of some, methinks it should be equally necessary with regard to the Salvation of all ; for must not the same Reason that constitutes its Necessity to one, as a Man, be equally forcible with regard to another, as such ? And if a supernatural Revelation from God, on account of its being either necessary to our eternal Salvation, or only of considerable Service to us with regard to it, be reasonably to be hoped for by all ; would that God who is no Respector of Persons withhold that from some, which he knew might reasonably (and therefore ought to) be hoped for by all ? Would an infinitely wise and good God disappoint the reasonable Hopes and Expectations of any of his reasonable Creatures ? Certainly one would think one might be bold to affirm, he would not. If (says Mr. Chubb) one Man should meet two Men upon the Road, carrying each of them a heavy Burden, who were equally wearied with their Journey, were both at the same Distance from their Home, and who were in all respects equally the Objects of his Pity ; and if he should assist one, and leave the other to wrestle with his Difficulties, when it was equally in his Power, and as easy for him to assist them both, this would be an Instance of great Partiality

Partiality, and an Indication, that it was not true Goodness, but some other Motive, which excited to the Action. The Application is easy.

Really these Objections, and others of the like Kind, are such Obstructions to my Belief of a partial Revelation from a God of universal Wisdom, Goodness and Power, as none of the Arguments I have yet seen offered in Support of it, have been able to remove. And Dr. *Benson* is so far from attempting to remove them, that his Manner of Phraseology directly implies them. “ *And therefore we may hope for a Revelation from him:*” We, who, as a Species of Beings, are distinguished from all other Species, whether Fowls of the Air, or Beasts of the Field, by a Principle of Reason and Understanding, which renders us capable of discerning the Difference between Good and Evil, Truth and Falshood; and discovering the Existence of a God posselt of all possible Perfections: We of this Species may, as such (alike and in common) hope for a Revelation from him. But alas, whatever Foundation there might be in Reason for the common Hopes of Mankind concerning such an universal Revelation, the rational Divines can allow the true Revelation to be the Privilege of but a few! for though the admitting, that there is a Foundation in Reason for our universal Hope of receiving a supernatural Revelation from God (concerning his Will with regard to us)

is absolutely inconsistent with a Revelation's being partially given to but a Handful of us, whilst the Hopes and Expectations of all the rest, which were equally just and reasonable with theirs who have it, be miserably defeated; the Dr. has no Reason to fear the Odium of Singularity; his rational Brethren find themselves in the same Dilemma with himself; either they must allow that a Revelation ought to have been given to all Mankind, in Consequence of the Universality of their Hope of a Revelation from him, who implanted these Hopes in them, “ *and therefore we may, that is, it is fit and reasonable that we should, hope for a Revelation from him;*” or else they must run counter to that known Maxim, the Truth of which is attested both by Reason and Scripture, that “ *God is no Respector of Persons.*” But in order to avoid, as much as may be, their being directly chargeable with maintaining either separately, they would seem to assert and defend them both.

In the Rev. Mr. *Balguy's* second Letter to a Deist, we have, I apprehend, a very apposite Instance of this. “ *Provision, on many Accounts,*” says he, *was wanting for Transgressors and Sinners; the whole Species was tainted, and every Individual guilty, in some Degree or other. In this common Exigence, this universal Distress, does it any ways reflect on the Author of the Gospel, to*  
“ *suppose*



“ *suppose him, among other Reliefs, opening Men’s*  
 “ *Minds, enlightning their Understandings, and pre-*  
 “ *paring them for the Reception of their eternal*  
 “ *Duty?*” No, surely; but in this common  
 Exigence, this universal Distress, where the whole  
 Species was tainted, and every Individual guilty,  
 dares this Author pretend, that the Author of the  
 Gospel has thereby provided a common Help,  
 an universal Assistance; a Resource as common  
 and universal as the Exigence and Distress? If  
 not, what Reflections must he deserve, for so  
 artfully expressing himself, as to insinuate to his  
 Reader, that this was the Case? When, upon  
 mentioning the common Exigence, and universal  
 Distress of the whole Species, he immediately asks,  
 If it any way reflects on the Author of the Gospel,  
 to suppose him, among other Reliefs, opening  
 Men’s Minds, enlightning their Understandings,  
 and preparing them for the Reception of their  
 eternal Duty? If he should deny that he intended  
 to insinuate, by this, that the Author of the Gospel  
 propos’d to open all Men’s Minds, and enlighten  
 all Men’s Understandings, by it, though he says  
 the whole Species was tainted, and every Indivi-  
 dual guilty; the Exigence common, and the  
 Distress universal; why had he not fairly expressed  
 his Meaning, and honestly added, the expletive  
 Term, *some*, where it was so necessary to have been  
 used, in order to convey to his Readers a just Idea  
 of his Intention? Was it not done designedly, for  
 fear

fear of leaving just Room for Reflection somewhere, that this explanatory Term was omitted? The Sentence, with but this small Addition, changes Complexion prodigiously: In this common Exigence, this universal Distress, does it any way reflect on the Author of the Gospel, to suppose him among other Reliefs, opening *some* Men's Minds, enlightning *some* Men's Understandings, &c. To this Question I think I might fairly answer, with Impunity both from God and good Men, Yes, I think it does. I think such a partial and arbitrary Procedure would carry in it a Reflection on him of unaccountable Caprice, and that he must either want the Will or the Power requisite to confer the same Favours on the rest. A general Mind can have no Interest opposite to the general Good. By what Arguments then are we to be induced to think he had? which must undeniably seem to be the Case, if Thousands of Years after the Commencement of this universally deplorable Condition of the Species, and the removal of numberless Millions from this, to the other World; from a probationary, to an eternal State; he should at last send a special Messenger only to the Relief of a few, and with a Commission to open but some Men's Minds, and to enlighten only some Men's Understandings; when the Exigence was, and had been so long common, and the Distress was confessedly universal. Was the Distress universal, and not the necessary Assistance? Does this appear

to be a Conduct worthy of God, from any of the Attributes of the Divine Nature? Does the unfathomable Goodness, the infinite Wisdom of God, or even the generally mistaken Attribute of infinite Justice, in the least tend to support this indigested Opinion? Certainly, I think, not; but exactly the reverse; as might, I conceive, be easily shewn by a particular Consideration of each, and an Application of them to the Subject before us. What! all need a supernatural Revelation, and but some have it! Would he who created us but to communicate Happiness to us, refuse the necessary Means of it to some, for no other Reason but unreasonable Will? and from the same preposterous Motive confer it on others? Does such a Representation of the divine Conduct consist with the Notion of Paternal Benevolence in infinite Perfection, and that unlimited and impartial Regard to the Happiness of all his rational Offspring, that must be supposed from the Consideration of this Attribute to reside in the Deity?

If it should be here replied, that it was not absolutely necessary to the Happiness of all; I ask, How then does it appear, that all were in the same common Exigence? One should be ready to imagine, that if a supernatural Revelation were necessary to be exhibited to some only, those for whom it was necessary had lost Sight of the Law of Nature in a much greater Degree, and they were

were a Set of Wretches almost infinitely more abandon'd to an immoral, profligate and licentious Course of Life, than those who stood not in that Necessity of it, which is doing an Honour to the Heathen World, that I presume was altogether undesigned them, by those who thus accidentally reflect it upon them. Mr. *Balguy* proceeds —

“ *If they had in some Measure lost sight of the Law*  
 “ *of Nature, could it be amiss to set it before them in*  
 “ *such a Light as was most agreeable to their Con-*  
 “ *dition? or even to add such Precepts as might*  
 “ *conduce to their Recovery and Growth in Vir-*  
 “ *tue?*”

If they had in some measure lost Sight of the Law of Nature, &c. They, Who? The whole distressed Species, every guilty Individual? would one not naturally be led to imagine so? If these are all comprehended in the Term *they*, it could not be amiss, it is readily acknowledged, to set it before them, agreeable to their Condition: And if it could not be amiss to set it before them all in a Light agreeable to their Condition, and the Gospel only could exhibit it in this Light to them, why was it not by the Gospel so set before them? If it was not amiss to do it, one is ready to think it should be proper to be done; and if it was, in the Nature and Fitness of things, proper to be done, it certainly would have been done, because the Reason and Fitness of Things is the Rule by which the Deity

Deity invariably governs all his Actions. If therefore it was proper to be done with regard to some, it was proper to be done with regard to all ; but it has not been done to all, therefore I conclude it has not been done to any, in the way contended for, namely, a supernatural Revelation.

To conclude, The Deists on their own Principles can readily allow the Christians, That whatever in *Benson*, or *Balguy*, *Derham* or *Ray*, *Locke* or *Newton*, *Clarke* or *Addison*, or in any or all the Writers of the Scriptures, both the old Testament and the New, is founded discernably in Truth, and apparently supported by Reason ; has a natural Tendency to promote Purity of Heart and Rectitude of Manners ; or, in short, Virtue here, and Happiness hereafter, is right. Whatever has a manifest contrary Tendency is as certainly wrong : And whatever is in itself abstruse, ambiguous, and tends only to amuse and puzzle ; wherever found, how warmly soever inculcated, or by whomsoever recommended, as of Importance, is no Part of, nor has any Relation to, the Religion essential to Man.

This then is, as it were, the Religion of the Deist in Miniature, or a concise Summary of Deism ; and such only as regulate their Conversations accordingly, are properly true Deists ; for these not only profess Reason was intended for, but shew  
by



by the Regularity of their Conduct that to them it indeed is of, constant and perpetual Use. And they would beg leave to insist upon it with the rational Divines as a Piece of common Justice, they as Men have a Right to lay claim to, that they would join the moral Doctrines singly to the moral Precepts ; and when they have thus connected them as they naturally are, and they have thoroughly purged them of all Additions, and Mixtures of Unintelligibles ; that they would call this, and only this, Deism ; and the Man who governs his whole Conduct accordingly, that is, who in his Measure so believes, and so behaves, a true Deist. Every moral Doctrine, 'tis obvious, relates to some moral Precept, and every moral Precept necessarily relates to the rational Powers of Perception and Volition, in the human Composition ; and those Powers and Faculties of the human Mind, relate to all the various Beings such Precepts respect ; which Beings, may all be reduced to three general Classes, God, our Fellow-Creatures, and ourselves ; so that every Precept, which the human Understanding perceives to be founded in Truth and Nature, it perceives it to be so, because it perceives it to result from the Relation subsisting between itself, and some one or other of those several Beings ; which, to it, alone constitutes its Obligation to discharge it, as natural, fit, and reasonable. Every thing therefore, contained either in the Bible or in any of the numerous Commentaries

taries on any Part or Parts thereof, or in any of the Writings of any, or all, the great Men among the Moderns or Antients, Philosophers or Divines, whether Matter of Belief or Practice, concerning either God, our Fellow Creatures, or ourselves ; that is, or can be, a proper Object of, and is really and apparently supported by Reason ; and is thereby proved to have its Foundation in Truth and Nature ; is (call it whatever else you please) an essential Part of Deism, or the true original Religion of Reason and Nature. And then, if nothing, that is (or can be made appear to be) supported by Reason, in Christianity, or traditional Revelation, but must as such, at the same time, necessarily appear to be a Part of Deism, original Revelation, or the Constitution or Nature ; then there is nothing in Christianity or traditional Revelation, but what is not, or cannot be supported by Reason, that stands opposed to Deism, or on his Principles can be opposed by a true Deist.

If then Deism takes in every Doctrine and every Precept that is either discernably right, good, or true, and excludes only Doctrines that are either absolutely unintelligible, or evidently wrong, evil, or false ; and such Precepts only as are confessedly no constituent Parts of true Religion ; and Christianity takes in unintelligible Doctrines and Precepts that are no constituent

Parts of true Religion ; I would leave it with every Man who hath Reason to direct him, and an immortal Soul to be made happy or miserable in a future State, as he shall act a reasonable or an unreasonable Part in this : To judge which of the two is the Religion most agreeable to the divine, or suitable to, and worthy of the human Nature ? And whether that Religion which is reasonable, right, and fit, and only so throughout, and of a piece in all its Parts ; or that, which is in part to be understood, and in Part is unintelligible, in Part only is discernably right ; and is in Part, for ought we do, or can know to the contrary, wrong, be in its own Nature most eligible, and consequently to be embraced by him, as he is a reasonable, a free, and an accountable Creature ?

And now, perhaps, it may be thought high time for me to forbear enlarging. Whether I have succeeded in my main Design, by giving a just and true Representation of Deism, and have vindicated it from the groundless Calumnies it has been loaded with, or not, I cheerfully submit to your candid Examination and Judgment, who I am well assured will determine according to the Dictates of sober Reason. As to Dr. *Benson's* Answer to *Christianity not founded on Argument*, I flatter myself you will admit that I have clearly shewn it to be far from a complete one. And as I have observed to you, that I conceive my present

Sentiments

Sentiments may properly enough be characterized by the Term *Deism*, and that I acknowledge myself to dissent from the current and generally received Opinions of the Times, and from the Tenets I was educated in, and have shewn you the Grounds upon which I have acted in so doing ; yet, notwithstanding, if you, or any other judicious Christian can, and will be pleased, in the Spirit of Meekness, to shew me that hereby I have departed from the Principles of Reason, Truth and Soberness ; I assure you, Sir, I am fully determined, like the ever memorable Mr. *Chillingworth*, to take the Shame of another Change. In the mean time I beg leave to add, that I am, with all due Respect,

*Worthy Sir,*

*Your much obliged,*

*Humble Servant,*

A MORAL PHILOSOPHER.

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and  
 wondering how you are getting on. I hope you  
 are well and happy. I have been very busy  
 lately, but I have managed to find some time  
 to write you. I have been thinking of you  
 very much lately, and wondering how you are  
 getting on. I hope you are well and happy.  
 I have been very busy lately, but I have  
 managed to find some time to write you. I  
 have been thinking of you very much lately,  
 and wondering how you are getting on. I  
 hope you are well and happy. I have been  
 very busy lately, but I have managed to find  
 some time to write you. I have been thinking  
 of you very much lately, and wondering how  
 you are getting on. I hope you are well and  
 happy. I have been very busy lately, but I  
 have managed to find some time to write you.

1892





## DATE DUE

[illegible]



